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PS3 | Xbox 360 | Revolution | PS2 | GC | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro

FEATURE

BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS

The new kids on the development block

PREVIEWED

- **SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS** [PS2]
- **PERFECT DARK ZERO** [XB360]
- **MARIO & LUIGI 2** [DS]
- **SERIOUS SAM II** [PC]
- **GUITAR HERO** [PS2]
- **GUN** [PS2/XB/GC/XB360]
- **PREY** [PC/XB360]

F.E.A.R.

FIRST ENCOUNTER ASSAULT RECON



PREVIEW

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

Come in, Agent 47 – your time is up


eMag



Change. You might not necessarily fear it, but nobody can honestly admit that they like it. Regardless, there's no getting away from it, especially in this industry. Things move incredibly fast for us gamers – so fast, in fact, that no-one really gets a chance to complain. And to be honest, that's a good thing – after all, if we kicked up a fuss over every little thing, the industry would still be built on Atari 2600s and *Pitfall*. Not that our Retro Editor would complain, of course.

With that in mind, we're hoping that you'll see change as a good thing when it comes to **games™**, rather than looking for a negative side. The process will be slow (though not painful), subtle and, ultimately, for the better. Heck, it's already begun and you haven't even noticed. We won't be putting up the 'Under New Management' sign any time soon, but rest assured I'm neither as tall nor as thin as my predecessor. And that's a good thing too. Really, it is.

Martin Mathers
Editor




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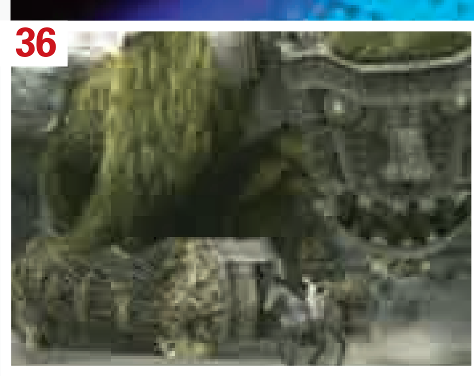
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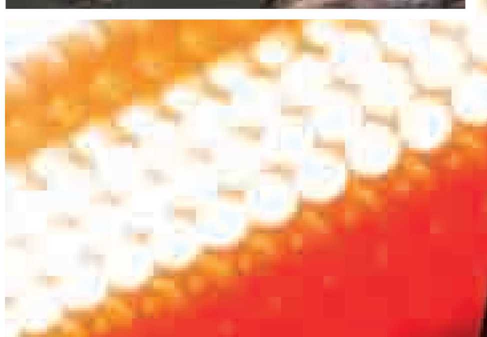
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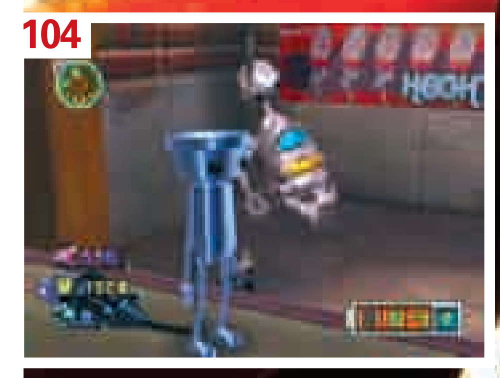
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Codename 47, Silent Assassin, Contracts… all just precursors to the biggest game of IO Interactive's career. games™ travels to Denmark to find out more…

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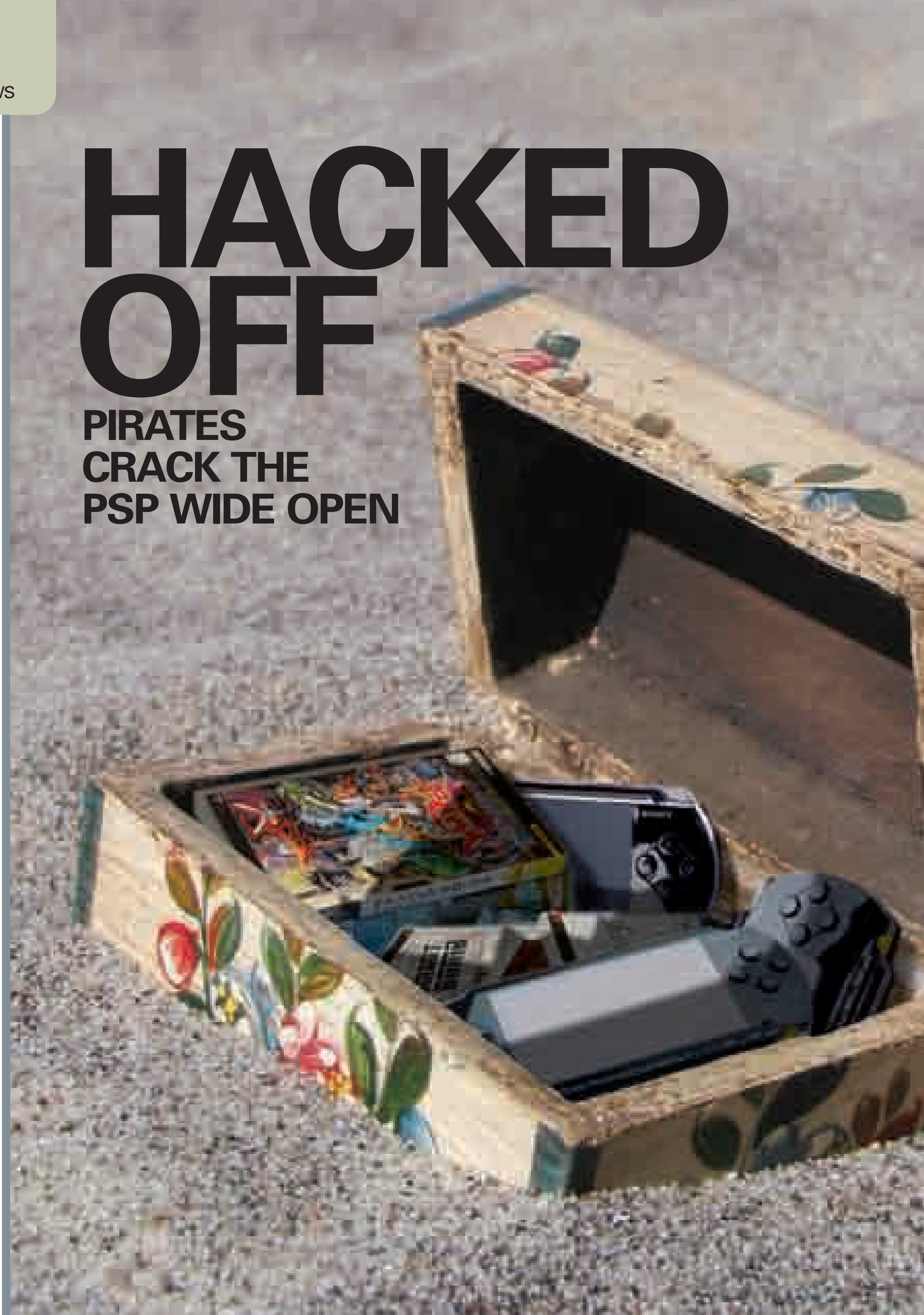
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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

HACKED OFF

PIRATES CRACK THE PSP WIDE OPEN





TROUBLE IN PARADISE

COULD ANYONE HAVE PREDICTED THAT SONY'S BID FOR THE HANDHELD THRONE WOULD CAUSE SO MANY PROBLEMS?

"ANY **PIRACY IS BAD FOR THE CREATIVE PROCESS**, WHICH IS WHY WE WORK TO **STAY ON TOP OF THE PROBLEM**"

MICHAEL RAWLINSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, ELSPA

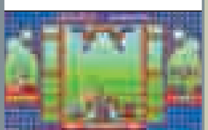
Who'd have thought cracking the PSP would be so easy? We knew it would happen eventually, but it seems hackers have already succeeded in making Sony's new handheld play pirated games from its memory stick.

Almost as soon as the PSP launched in Japan and the US, hackers had managed to make emulators freely available for the device, allowing owners of the handheld to relive the age of the SNES and PSone. But it's only recently that pirate PSP games have started appearing on sites.

"We have only found a few games available, and we are making enquiries and closing in on the few people who are selling pirated games," said Michael Rawlinson, deputy director of publishers association Elspa. "Any piracy is bad for the creative process and that's why we work to stay on top of the problem right from the beginning."

Sony's priority now has to be stopping, or at least slowing, the rate at which the games are becoming available, and one of the key ways it plans to do this is by updating the machine's firmware. "As I understand it, firmware upgrades will be implemented every time you insert a new game disc," Rawlinson told us. "Users will be forced to upgrade and this will prevent the older hacked games from playing, so it should go a long way to slow the process of using pirated products."

It's a reasonable plan, but as we found out when Microsoft tried to clamp down on Xbox mod chips the pirates seem to stay one step ahead, and we can't see the situation improving soon.



Puzzle Bobble is among the titles available from the internet.

PIRATE PICTURES

It's not only games software that Sony is going to have to keep an eye on. Software allowing you to rip DVDs into the appropriate format to play on the PSP memory stick is now available online, which raises the prospect of widespread movie piracy on top of all the troubles that the pirate games are causing. "Sony have a direct stake in the movie business as well," said Elspa's Michael Rawlinson, "so I'm sure they will be working hard to prevent piracy in this area as well. We will be liaising with FACT, the film and DVD anti-piracy organisation, to co-ordinate our efforts for both films and games." This is also going to be a tough problem for Sony to tackle, as DVD pirates have eluded crackdowns for years.



All the fun of *Lumines* for a low, low price. It's a crime. Really.

HARDWARE WOES

Just in case you thought all this talk of piracy wasn't enough hassle for the industry giant, even the supposedly simple act of purchasing a PSP here in the UK is causing a fair amount of problems. Online retailers such as ElectricBirdLand and Nuplayer have ended up being dragged to court by Sony and accused of infringing trademarks, therefore importing and selling PSPs illegally. At the time of writing, Sony has failed to win an injunction against Nuplayer to stop it selling PSPs to UK gamers. The judge presiding over the case said he needed more time to go through the evidence, so Sony may have more of a fight on its hands than it first anticipated.



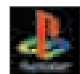
Whether Sony can control piracy with updated firmware is debatable.

OUR TWO CENTS

You really can't help but feel that these piracy issues will serve Sony well in the long run. Sure, there'll be a fair loss of profits when more games become downloadable, but when you've launched a machine that lends itself so easily to piracy it surely can't be much of a surprise when people take advantage – especially when running games from the memory stick removes those painfully long loading times that accompany each purchased title. Besides, just think of all the people who'll opt for the PSP over the DS now that it's common knowledge that you can download emulators and get a console's entire back catalogue for nothing. It may be illegal, but since when has that stopped the average gamer?



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



TRIPLE PLATINUM

Sony is once again leading the charge on aggressive pricing by dropping the price of all its Platinum budget games to a mere £14.99. However, its rivals are not planning to follow suit. "There are no current plans to reduce the pricing of our Xbox Classics range," a Microsoft spokesperson told website Eurogamer. Nintendo has also quashed rumours of a price drop for its budget GameCube titles or any Game Boy games. Despite Sony's generosity, however, some gamers are worried this is a softener before the – potentially very high – next-gen prices are announced.





MARLON GONE

Electronic Arts has announced that it will not be using Marlon Brando's voice in its *Godfather* game. The actor had recorded dialogue for the game shortly before his death, but a report in the *New York Times* has claimed that the quality of the recording was hampered by Brando's ill health as he was unable to breathe without an oxygen mask. EA has been forced to turn to a sound-a-like to re-record Vito Corleone's dialogue, although the firm says it may be able to use parts of the Brando recording.





Shooting a woman is fine. Sleeping with her isn't. Um…

This isn't the first time Rockstar's courted controversy.

OUTRAGE AT HIDDEN 'SEX' GAME IN SAN ANDREAS

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

A pornographic mini-game in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* has landed developer Rockstar in hot water. Again. The mini-game, branded 'Hot Coffee' by those who discovered it, which can be accessed via a mod or by way of an Action Replay, is sexually explicit and has caused an uproar in the States.

The former first lady herself, Hillary Clinton, has heavily criticised the ESRB (Entertainment Software Ratings Board) for failing to award *San Andreas* an 'AO' (adults only) rating, after details of Hot Coffee came to the fore.

The mini-game was found by a *GTA* fan, Patrick Wildenborg, who insists that his mod merely unlocks content that was buried in the *San Andreas* code – a statement that has now been proven to be true thanks to the websites that have supplied codes and saves that can unlock the mini-game in the Xbox and PS2 versions using nothing more than an Action Replay. At the time of going to press, Rockstar and parent company Take 2 have still denied any wrong-doing.

Although the codes available are currently only compatible with US versions of the game and equipment, we took the time to test them for ourselves and, as patchy and unimpressive as it is, the mini-game that can be accessed is likely to drop Rockstar in a world of trouble with the ESRB for not declaring it. The game is currently rated 'M', restricting it to over-17s, but the sexual content would have earned it an 'AO' rating, which may have affected sales.

"As far as we're concerned we classify what is submitted to us," said Sue Clark, head of publicity at the BBFC, the company responsible for providing age certificates for games in the UK. "We require, and expect, the games industry to provide us with access to all levels of a game and to highlight any areas that might affect the classification." She also pointed out how easy it is for hackers to alter games, saying, "it is possible, for someone with the ability, to modify any game and place the download on the internet."

Senator Clinton has now asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the matter, explaining in a letter that "there is no doubting the fact that the widespread availability of sexually explicit and graphically violent videogames makes the challenge of parenting much harder."

As a result of this fuss, Rockstar plans to re-master the game without the sexual content so it can keep its M-rating, but until the replacements can be shipped to stores,

all existing copies will have to either be pulled from the shelves or labelled with the appropriate rating.

It's amazing how a sex scene – and a laughable one at that – can cause such an uproar, especially considering the rest of the game's content and the fact that during a recent visit to San Francisco we stumbled upon a number of pods running the 'offending' title in the middle of a Virgin Megastore. One pod was being played by a young boy who looked positively gleeful about the fact that he was gunning down a couple of pedestrians.

Still, this latest outcry will focus our attention on an element of the game that's not only nowhere near as offensive as much of the accepted content, but also not even available without a large amount of effort being made on the player's part. Yup, makes sense to us…

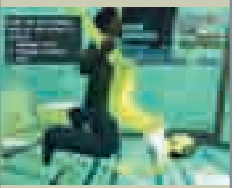
"THERE IS **NO DOUBTING THE FACT** THAT THE WIDESPREAD AVAILABILITY OF SEXUALLY EXPLICIT VIDEOGAMES **MAKES PARENTING HARDER**"

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

It shouldn't come as any surprise to anyone to hear that Miami-based lawyer Jack Thompson has got involved in the scandal. When it comes to complaining about violence in videogames, the man rarely misses a trick and this time he's launched an attack on Entertainment Software Association (ESA) president Doug Lowenstein.

In a letter addressed to ESA members, Thompson accused the association of failing to act on the issue of the Hot Coffee mod and went on to say that Lowenstein's approach to the problem was "to demonise critics and to engage in ad hominem jihads intended to obscure real concerns about real industry abuses."

The letter was full of personal attacks on the ESA president, whom Thompson also claimed had "never met a pixilated prostitute he didn't like". As if this wasn't ridiculous enough, Thompson then went on to compare Lowenstein to Hitler. How silly.





NOT ANOTHER...

HALF-LIFE 2 STORY

EA SNAPS UP LUCRATIVE DISTRIBUTION DEAL

As has been well documented in these pages over the past few months, VU Games and Valve Software have suffered something of a falling out in the last year. Months of legal battling culminated on 28 April, when the companies parted ways, ending a five-year publishing deal.

This left the Xbox edition of *Half-Life 2*, as well as restocks of the PC version, floundering without a publisher… for all of five minutes. Unsurprisingly, both were snapped up as quickly as possible, and what else but the sheer might of Electronic Arts was going to win that battle?

Tom Frisina, vice president and general manager of EA Partners, considers *Half-Life 2* and *Counter-Strike* to be "two of the best game franchises of all time". "We could not be more excited to have the opportunity to help deliver these outstanding games to players around the globe," he said.

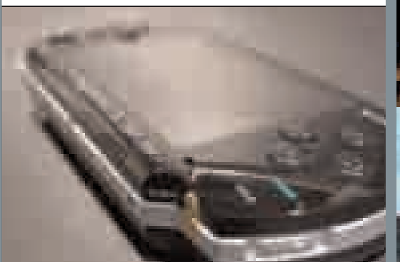
Due for release soon, the Game Of The Year edition of *Half-Life 2* will come complete with *Counter-Strike: Source* as well as *Half Life 2: Deathmatch* and *Half-Life: Source* all in the same box – quite a tidy package for the publishing gargantuan – while the Xbox version is due before the end of the year. We're just happy to see an end to the legal wrangling so Xbox owners can finally enjoy the *Half-Life 2* experience.

Data Stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



CROSS MY PALM WITH SILVER

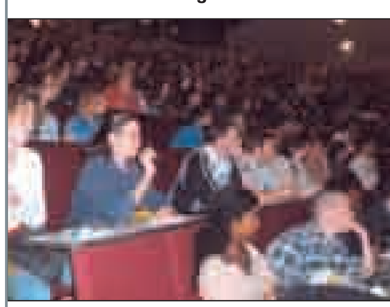
Sony may be about to reveal a shimmering silver version of its PSP. The special edition has appeared on trade price lists being circulated among Japanese retailers. Sony, remaining typically quiet, is unwilling to comment on the leak, saying it's "speculation". This is not the first time the PSP has sported a new coat – blue and silver versions made an appearance at May's E3, while a ceramic white version is already on the way in Japan. No doubt Sony will launch the PSP in new colours as an extension strategy later in the machine's life, as it has done with the PS2.





INDIE ROCK AND ROLL

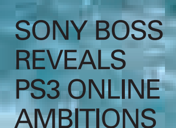
GarageGames has announced that registration for Indie Games Con (IGC) 2005 is now open. The event, to be held in Eugene, Oregon, in early October, has become a key part of the independent games community. IGC is a summit of developers, with seminars on art, technology, tools and business, and allows those trying to both break into the industry to share knowledge. It costs a mere $195 fee for a three-day pass (plus air fares, obviously). Those wishing to register can do so at www.indiegames.com.





Could Microsoft be concentrating too much on its online content? Sony seems to think so…





SONY BOSS REVEALS PS3 ONLINE AMBITIONS

SURF'S UP

As the release dates for the next-gen consoles draw nearer, new information regarding the machines' capabilities is coming to light. The first, and most interesting, revelation is the suggestion that Sony's PlayStation3 will allow users to browse and download from the internet.

The ability to download media from the internet was actually something that was set to feature on the PlayStation2, but although the technology was available to provide the downloads an adequate infrastructure wasn't in place and the plans fell though. Now though, with the introduction of fast broadband connections and high-definition television, it's certainly looks to be a possibility; indeed, SCEA boss Kaz Hirai recently told US publication *EGM* that "there's really no reason why we or some other software publisher can't come out with a web browser."

Hirai also confirmed that it will be possible to connect a keyboard or any other USB peripheral to the ports on the PlayStation3 and that the decision on whether the console will ship with a browser will largely be based on consumer demand.

Although this is an element that is likely to pull in plenty of sales, Sony has been quick to point out that this will only be one of the machine's key features and there are plenty of others to also get excited about. Hirai has even criticised Microsoft and its reliance on Live, saying that "[Microsoft] seem to have put all their eggs in the online basket".

> "I'M **NOT BELITTLING ONLINE GAMING**, BUT THERE ARE OTHER IMPORTANT **ASPECTS ONE CANNOT FORGET**"

"I've said from day one that online is not the be-all and end-all," Hirai continued. "It's a great experience and it's a very important thing to embark on, but we don't want to lose sight of the fact that it's all about great content."

This statement actually sounds a lot more like one of Nintendo's speeches rather than Sony's, but it's nice to know that other companies are looking towards good old-fashioned gameplay and not just grand technological advances. "Talking about online is great," Hirai concluded. "Like I said, I'm not belittling it. But there are other important aspects that one cannot forget to ensure success in."

From the way the companies involved in the next-generation battle have been tearing strips off each other recently, this outburst is hardly surprising – and we expect a response from Microsoft soon. With Xbox 360 promising to build on the already strong foundations of Live, has Sony got itself into a scrap it might lose?



ADVERT RISING

ATARI SIGNS UP TO IN-GAME ADVERTISING NETWORK

American company Massive Inc. has completed beta testing "the world's first videogame advertising network", and Atari is the first publisher to sign up. Massive's network works by linking a game in development with a database of advertisements; the developer can then download the relevant adverts and place them in the game using texture replacement technology. Several firms have already signed up with Massive, including Coca Cola, Honda, Intel, Paramount and T-Mobile.

Atari is the first videogames company to get involved in what will no doubt prove to be a highly lucrative partnership. The *Driv3r* publisher has put forward management sim *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* for integration with the advertising network, meaning that ads will appear in the game on billboards and in shop windows.

This is nothing we haven't seen before (check out *Burnout 3*, for example) but the interesting aspect of this new system is that the adverts will change dynamically as the game progresses, due to the link with the advertising network.

We can understand why publishers want to include mainstream advertising in their products and as gaming becomes more popular publishers will need to increase their revenue. So as long as this advertising does not begin to infringe on gameplay or interrupt a game's flow then it's doing no real harm. Besides, we're sturdy enough to resist the fiercest advertiser's charms. Aren't we?



Your favourite characters will now be brought to you in association with pop and crisps.

gamesTM THE TOP FIVE

AMPLITUDE REMINDERS



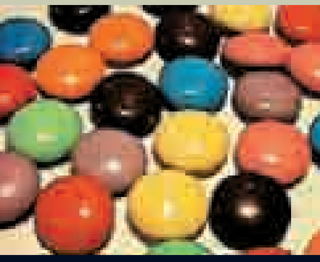
No.5 ANY MUSIC

We can pick the bass line out of any track



No.4 TWISTER

Not fun for any of the family any more



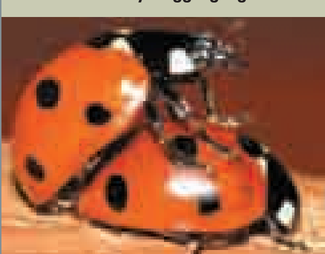
No.3 SMARTIES

…and most other colourful confectionery



No.2 UNIFORM BUTTONS

Wearer worried by waggling digits



No.1 MATING LADYBIRDS

All those moving dots… it's crazy

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



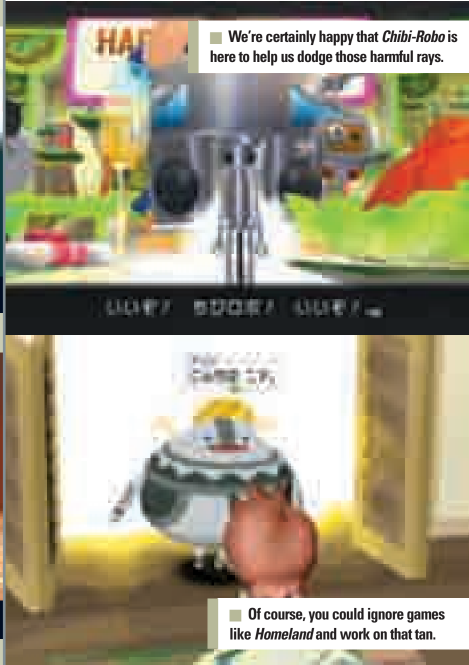
NO. 35: THE FICTIONAL 'DRY PERIOD'

The summer months have arrived and lazy afternoons on the beach are now a possibility for us Bournemouth dwellers. It's not all sandcastles and ice cream, though. We love videogames but with most publishers saving their killer titles for the run-up to Christmas there are just no decent games to play during this 'dry period', right? Wrong.

Despite what many may say, there's certainly no shortage of great titles out there should you actually bother to look – most people don't, preferring to bang on about a 'drought'.

Sure, you might have to spend a few extra pennies and wait a week or so for your purchases to make their way over the ocean, but great games such as *Chibi-Robo* and *Homeland* are available right now if you're not too scared to dip your toe into the importing pool. If you don't fancy it, fair enough, but we don't understand why people insist on whining about it so much.

Besides, when you think about it, the 'golden time' known as Christmas is only likely to reveal a few key titles accompanied by a sack-load of licensed letdowns anyway – certainly worth waiting for.



We're certainly happy that *Chibi-Robo* is here to help us dodge those harmful rays.

Of course, you could ignore games like *Homeland* and work on that tan.

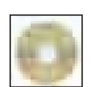


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



WORST. NEWS. EVER.

After last month's news that the Crazy Frog IP was up for grabs as a game licence, it's been confirmed that Digital Jesters has won the battle to bring us the ground-breaking *Crazy Frog Racer* this winter. Although his success still mystifies us, there's no doubt the cretinous little bastard is big business, and at a price of £19.99 both confused grannies and stupid kids will lap this up. If the game is anything more than a thinly veiled excuse for the hateful amphibian to scoot around screaming 'ding dinga ding ding' we'll be very surprised.



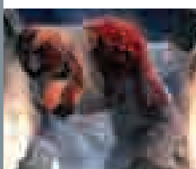
DOUBTING TOMONOBU

Tomonobu Itagaki, head honcho at Team Ninja, has expressed his anxiety over Microsoft's decision to use the DVD format on Xbox 360. Team Ninja is working on *Dead Or Alive 4*, which is due to be an Xbox 360 launch title. "With *DOA4* we'll be using the disc's capacity to its full extent," Itagaki told a Japanese games magazine. "We started development on *DOA4* pretty early, and we didn't know what disc format the Xbox 360 format was going to adopt." Apparently there won't be enough room for all the FMV. So do we get more game, then?









***House Of The Dead 4* faithfully adheres to the bloodiness of its forebears.**

SEGA CONFIRMS NEW ARCADE TITLES, DENIES XBOX 360 LINK

ALL ABOUT THE LINDBERGH, BABY

Sega revealed the next generation of arcade technology – in the form of its new Lindbergh arcade board – at a private showcase held early last month.

The announcement follows months of speculation over the development of a new arcade board, after UK-based technology developer Imagination – the owner of the PowerVR line of graphic accelerators – confirmed in its 2004/2005 financial reports that it was supplying new technology to Sega-Sammy Holdings for the creation of boards within the company's arcade divisions. Such developments are the first completely unique boards for Sega since the launch of the Naomi board, itself an interpretation of its own Dreamcast technology. The Chihiro and Triforce boards, co-developments between Microsoft, Nintendo and Namco, were based on Xbox and GameCube technology respectively and represented the first time Sega had relied on external sources for its arcade developments.

On top of the new board being revealed, Sega has also uncovered the first games for the system: *House Of The Dead 4*, *Virtua Fighter 5* and *Afterburner 3*. While all three games were seen during a private screening on Sega's E3 stand back in May, *House Of The Dead 4* has already started appearing at test sites throughout Japan. Eschewing the large shotguns that its predecessor used, *HOTD4* offers smaller, single-hand, SMG-style weapons, runs at a solid 60 frames per second and houses a massive 62-inch high-definition monitor within its cabinet.

Opinions from test subjects have so far been incredibly positive, with the game using many tricks that Sega has learned from its previous lightgun titles (in particular, *Ghost Squad*).

However, the company was quick to dismiss rumours that the new board was based on Microsoft's new Xbox 360 technology in a similar fashion to the Chihiro's link to the original Xbox. Speaking to industry news site gamesindustry.biz, a representative from Sega Amusements insisted that "Lindbergh is not based on next-generation consoles" and that "while we have announced a new arcade version of *House Of The Dead*, the company cannot confirm a next-generation console version at this time".

Such news will obviously come as a blow to those gamers expecting a quick turnaround on arcade-to-console ports of Sega's upcoming titles (as was seen with *House Of The Dead 3* and *Crazy Taxi 3*). Even so, Sega is fully aware of the importance of the home market, especially in these days of arcade decline, so it's unlikely that the chances of such a conversion should be ruled out completely.

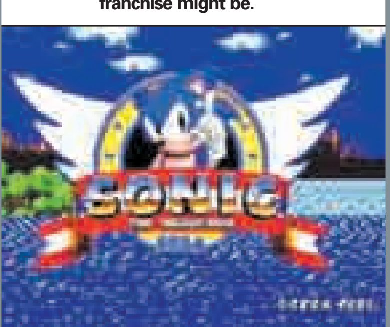
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



IMPENDING CHAOS?

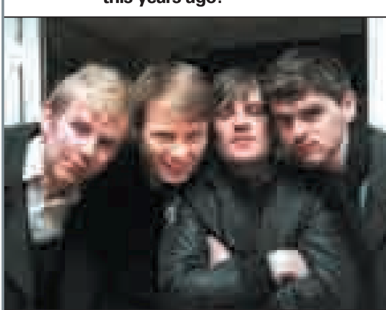
Sega has joined developer Secret Level to "re-create a classic Sega franchise" for Microsoft and Sony's next-gen consoles. However, neither party is saying what the game might be, so rumours of a new *Sonic* title are rife. It's a clever ploy by Sega – whipping gamers into a frenzy but not letting on what the game is; for all we know, it could be a *Columns* sequel. Considering Secret Level has made *Karaoke Revolution* and *Magic: The Gathering – Battlegrounds*, we can't guess what the phoenix franchise might be.

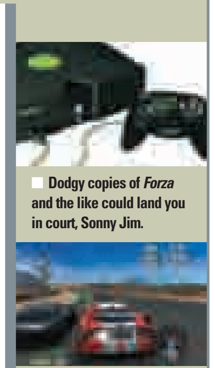




VIDEO KILLED THE VIDEOGAME STAR

In America, MTV2 has announced a second season of *Video Mods*, the show that mixes videogame action with music videos and animation to create something very 'now'. "The new season of *Video Mods* is going to bring the worlds of music, animation and game development together in a completely inventive fashion," said Alex Coletti, executive producer of MTV2. Didn't Super Furry Animals do this years ago?





Dodgy copies of *Forza* and the like could land you in court, Sonny Jim.

FIRST UK CONVICTION FOR CONSOLE MODDING



LIFE OF CRIME

A warning shot has been fired across the bows of all British videogame pirates, with the first conviction in the UK for console modding. Caerphilly Magistrates Court found a 22-year-old Cambridge graduate guilty of selling modified Xboxes from his website. The consoles had been fitted with 200Gb hard drives and 80 pre-installed games, with the modifications also allowing gamers to play counterfeit discs.

As well as having to pay £750 costs and forfeit all his console modding equipment, the convicted man has to carry out 140 hours of community service. The court said the leniency of the sentence reflected the youth of the culprit and the fact it was his first offence.

Of course, Elspa is more than happy with this conviction. "The modification of consoles is an activity that Elspa's anti-piracy team is prioritising and it's encouraging to see the UK courts doing the same," said Elspa deputy director Michael Rawlinson. "It sends a clear message to anyone tempted to become involved in chipping consoles."

Perhaps with the law toughening up on videogame piracy, this criminal activity may slow down, although it's going to be hard to stamp it out altogether.

XBOX JAPAN BOSS TALKS ABOUT 360 LAUNCH

SHOW AND TELL

It looks like Microsoft may be making a concerted effort to win over Japanese gamers. Yoshihiro Maruyama, head of Xbox Japan, has said that the Japanese launch of the Xbox 360 will be "a product unveiling on the scale of E3".

Due to take place on 25 July, shortly after this magazine goes to press, the Xbox Summit 2005 in Tokyo should crystallise Microsoft's plans for the Xbox 360. Information about the event has been scarce due to Microsoft's secretive nature, but since Maruyama decided to discuss the matter in detail with several Japanese publications it's far clearer what the company has planned. Maruyama certainly seems confident that the event will be a major one.

Although exactly which 360 titles will be on show at the launch isn't yet confirmed, though several Japanese publishers – including Game Republic, Mist Walker and Q Entertainment – are expected to announce their early titles for the machine at the event. This should prove interesting as although most Japanese publishers have suggested that they will support the console, few have actually announced any original titles.

The 360's next Japanese appearance will be at the Tokyo Games Show, when the console will appear in a playable form. However, going by Japan's past console tastes, the Playstation3 will be the star of the show even though it's unlikely to be in a playable state.



Microsoft is going to have to put in some effort if it wants to win round Japanese gamers.



Data Stream

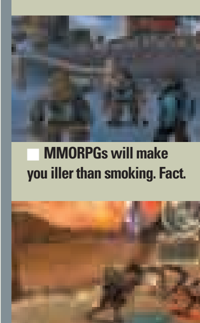
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

In last month's games™ we reported on the purchase of ISIS Models Inc (a London-based modelling agency) by Gizmondo manufacturer Tiger Telematics, insinuating that this purchase was based on the use of ISIS's female models to promote Tiger's products. Tiger has asked us to clarify that this information was taken out of context – not only did the purchase take place in May 2004 and thus shouldn't have been reported as current news, but the deal was regarding the development of technology that catered for the needs of successful young women, not the use of ISIS's models. As such, games™ would like to apologise for any offence or misunderstanding caused by this story.





MMORPGs will make you iller than smoking. Fact.

This hardly seems like a reason to see the doctor…



In bed with Nintendo and Microsoft? Hussy!



MIND GAMES

'INTERNET ADDICTION' CLINIC OPENED IN CHINA

Like most people, we're partial to a lengthy session on our favourite MMORPG, or a three-hour web trawl for funny Flash animations and pictures of monkeys in hats. And there's nothing wrong that… or is there?

The Chinese government seems to think so. In fact, it's opened the country's first clinic for 'internet addiction'. The clinic employs two dozen nurses and doctors who treat an undisclosed numbers of patients, mostly males in their teens and early twenties. Using methods such as electroshock therapy and psychotherapy sessions, the staff wean gamers and internet dependents off their habit.

CLinic director Dr Rao Tan told Associated Press about some of the symptoms shown by his patients. "They are suffering from depression, nervousness, fear, an unwillingness to interact with others, panic and agitation," he said. "They also have sleep disorders, the shakes and numbness in their hands."

A number of Dr Tan's patients spoke of their condition, making us concerned for our own mental wellbeing. "In school I didn't pay attention when teachers were talking," said a 20-year-old man. "All I could do was think about playing the next game. Playing made me happy." Isn't that most happily hardcore gamers? Nurse, the screens…

RARE TO DEVELOP FOR NINTENDO DS

A RARE BREED

The rumours are true: Rare is to develop games for Nintendo's DS. The studio has advertised a number of new jobs on its website, confirming that the studio is working on software for Nintendo's latest handheld. This won't come as a surprise to many, as Rare has continued its support for the GBA since its acquisition by Microsoft. In fact, it has actually released more GBA titles than Xbox games in this time.

More interesting are the theories flying around about possible connectivity between Xbox 360 and the DS. While this may sound preposterous, in theory an Xbox 360 with a wireless adapter could talk directly to a DS. *Pictochat* over Xbox Live? Yes please, don't mind if we do. So, is this all a ploy by Microsoft to infect its competition like a parasite? No, we didn't think so either. It's simply another potential source of revenue for Mr. Gates' immense company, especially considering Microsoft is not currently competing in the handheld market.



"say what you see"

Meaningless waffle from the industry

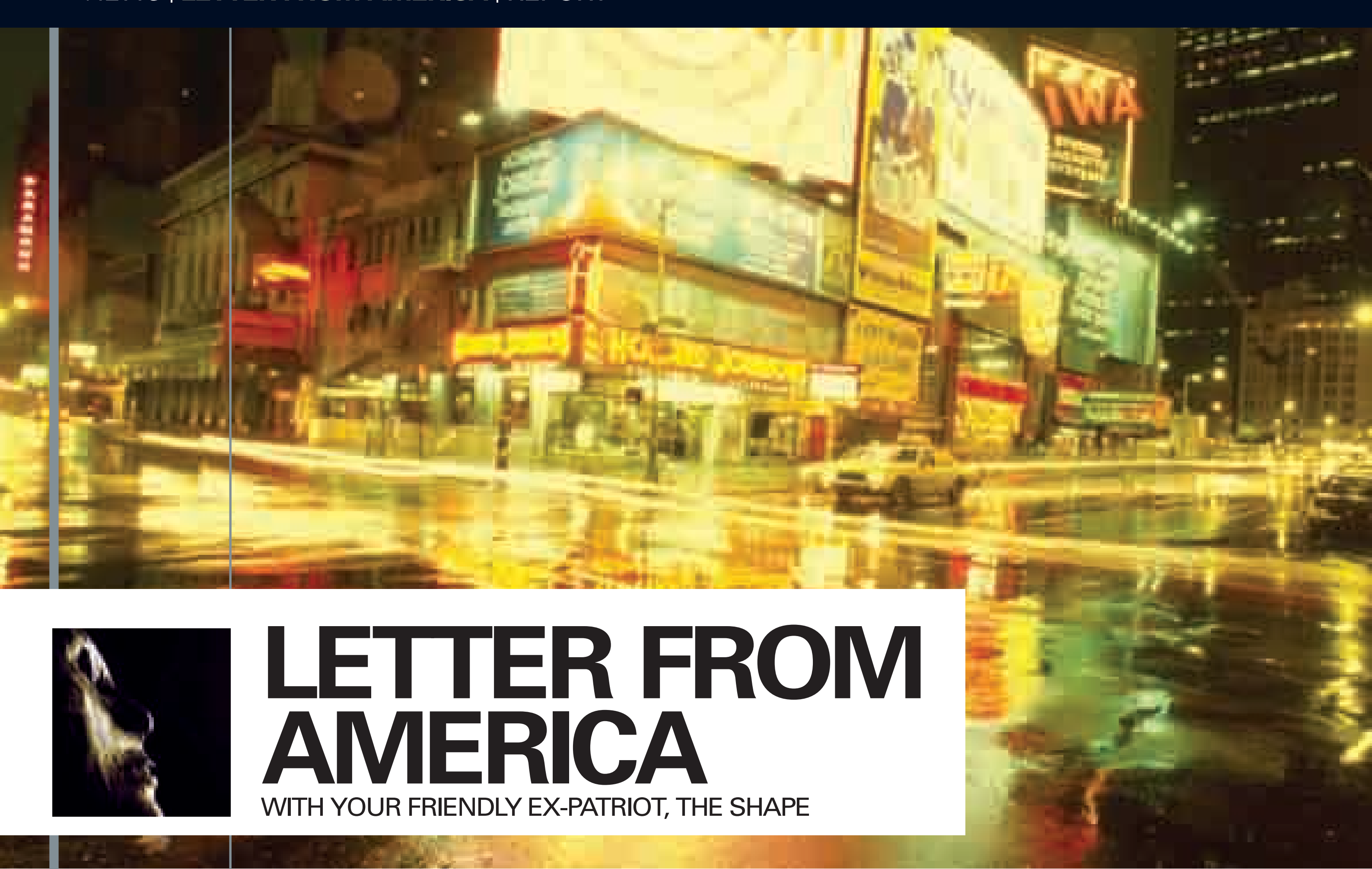
THIS MONTH This Month – Vivendi Universal's president, Phil O'Neal, lets us in his company's secret weapon

"50 Cent is going to be probably the most dynamic product in the games business, I predict, in the next 12 to 24 months"

games™ says: Dynamic (adj) 1. Full of energy and new ideas. That's what our dictionary says. How you can equate that with a game about a rapper beating people to death for no reason, we don't know.

MORE FROM MR CHIPS NEXT MONTH!


eMag



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"THE XBOX 360 IS ABOUT TO LEAD THE PACK, CHRONOLOGICALLY AT WORLD OF VIDEOGAMES. SO WHY ISN'T

This looks like a product that suits a flashy ad campaign. So where is it?

Douglas Adams wrote that the nine tenths of our brain we humans are famously said to never use are, in fact, used for storing penguins. While this hypothesis bears the rigid structure of strong scientific reasoning, I like to think that my nine tenths contain a kind of highly pressurised extra source of deific logic, sort of a nitrous oxide bottle of pure analytical sense, as well as a few episodes of *Knight Rider*.

Now that I've returned from let's-just-say not my favourite trip back to Britain, to settle some insignificant business about immigration visas (I didn't have one) with the Department of Homeland Security (they suggested I leave) by visiting the US embassy in London (they had machine guns), I have been able to focus this mighty beam of acuity on matters crucial to the Earth; in particular, the next generation of games consoles.

You know when you're at the movies and you see a lung-collapsingly cool trailer, which right at the end announces an opening date so preposterously distant that you wish the intervening period would just dissolve like time sherbert in the Pepsi of impatience so that you could get that euphoric entertainment bomb in your damn eyes right-the-hell now? Why aren't they doing that with our next generation of consoles? Your average American consumer isn't trawling the torrent trackers for the PS3 bathtub demo, but he is enormously manipulated by dramatic big-budget hyperbole. Ten frantic seconds of that *Killzone* footage edited to the right urgent-sounding orchestral score, followed by a loudly reverberating boom and the words 'spring 2006', would have these people making wee in their blue Levis with excitement. This doesn't have to be at the cinema, it could be on TV, or on rental DVDs.

The Japanese companies can possibly be forgiven, as their launch schedules are vague and unsettled, but Xbox 360 is coming in November. Additionally, it hails from an American company. America! Land of hype, of glitz and glamour, of false prophets, of a million different idols that draw worship from the Lord! If anyone understands the need for an arresting teaser campaign (and I don't mean posing painfully obscure riddles on a viral marketing website fated only to be seen by the one demographic not in need of such advertising) it should be the west coast boys behind the 360.

This company is about to lead the pack, in the chronological sense at least, in the $28 billion-per-annum world of videogames. Why, then, isn't it telling Joe Schmoe about it? I think it's because it doesn't want him to stop buying games. How many informed customers will purchase the farcically delayed ("March! May! We don't know! June!") *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* when it finally litters store shelves this September?



LEAST, IN THE $28 BILLION-PER-ANNUM MICROSOFT TELLING US ABOUT IT?"

Anyone aware of the looming hardware transition knows that within as little as six weeks that game will suddenly ming with the immediacy of a busty post-op who, you discover, is also a dangly pre-op. The 360 will explode onto the scene and titles of even the highest profile from the preceding weeks will turn, in short order, to junk. The entire fall '05 catalogue of releases faces a similar hyper-ageing hell. D'you know how long my friends and I have been waiting for *Sniper Elite*? Longer than you've been in adult shoe sizes, and now we have to avoid it altogether as it's scurrying out right before the dawn of a new era that will make it seem crap.

At least as the primary (and home) market we can be reasonably certain that the high-def, high-impact performance of the next stage in home entertainment will, you know, actually show up on time. The sensation of uncertainty surrounding such things in a secondary market was never one that I endured with any comfort back home in Britain. Remember what happened with the PSP and, in fact, any number of launches previously. Flash-car executives without a trace of reverence for the videogame medium make cold, callous decisions that affect our happiness meter for months at a stretch. 'Course, you know what's wrong with them, don't you? Penguins for brains.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

QED



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

2006 Dodge Charger SRT8

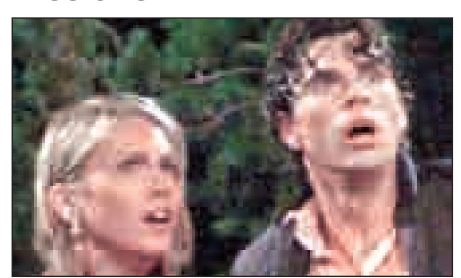


GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

PASSIONS



You don't know low-quality daily drama until you've seen US television. *As The World Turns, Days Of Our Lives, Guiding Light*… they're all bad, but the worst is surely *Passions*. The cast consists of 75 failed male and female models, with one old bloke as the plotting businessman. Robotic timing and drama-class posing are the tools these dumb beauties employ to belt out absurd plots that include past lives and witches.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	PS2
2	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	EA Games	PS2
3	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	PS2
4	Fantastic Four	Activision	PS2
5	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Xbox
6	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Xbox
7	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	EA Games	Xbox
8	Star Wars Episode III: ROTS	LucasArts	PS2
9	Batman Begins	EA Games	Xbox
10	Fantastic Four	Activision	Xbox

(Updated 19/07/05)


Destroy All Humans!

Fantastic Four



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"THE PREFECTURE OF KANAGAWA BANNED THE SALE OF GTA TO WELCOME TO TAKE A 15-MINUTE TRAIN RIDE TO SHINAGAWA

■ He may be bald but he carries a big stick. Not that it matters, of course.

The first order of business in this column is to let you all know that, contrary to Sony's recent press releases, *Genji: Dawn Of The Samurai* is not based on the 11th Century novel *The Tale Of Genji*. Let me tell you, if *Genji* was based on *The Tale Of Genji* we'd be in for one boring game – like one of those Japanese dating sims, only it'd be impossible to win and the hero would be a vague jerk who dies three quarters of the way through, leaving an upstart distant relation to sit around complaining about politics for the final 16-hour cut-scene. No, no, *Genji* the game is based on the story of Yoshitsune, the ninth son and heir of the Minamoto (Genji) family. The Heian Era (Japan's renaissance) came to a close amid natural disasters and chaos, and the Heike family slipped in and was messing around. Yoshitsune and his giant, Heike-hating friend Benkei rose to the challenge and drove out the Heike warlords in 1129.

Anyway, *Genji* seems to be selling fairly well. The past eight months have seen the release of two games based on the Yoshitsune legend (From Software's *The Legend Of Hero Yoshitsune* is actually pretty good – a bit like *Armored Core* with samurai), and a TV drama series starring pop idol Tackey as Yoshitsune and drama-star-turned-pop-idol Ken Matsudaira as Benkei. But what makes Sony's game stand out? Is it the involvement of *Street Fighter II* and *Onimusha* producer Yoshiki Okamoto? Not according to a friend in the Sony Computer Entertainment packaging department: the game is selling because of its faux-gold-leaf jacket. The golden jacket is so impressive, says my friend, that the designers insisted on the DVD case being transparent. Anyone walking through a store will see the case and say 'Oooh'.

The television commercials for *Genji* feature Kazu Kiyohara, star third-baseman of the Yomiuri Giants, swinging a giant club that looks much like Benkei's. Kiyohara did the motion-capture for Benkei, and this fact is widely known to pretty much any Japanese person with access to a television. They know this because Kiyohara has, in the past, been entangled in many a controversy for being a bit of a boozer and a womaniser.

As if that weren't enough to bring the game down in flames of controversy, just a month before *Genji*'s release the prefecture of Kanagawa (known to foreigners as Yokohama) banned the sale of *Grand Theft Auto* and any 18+ rated games to minors. Minors are now welcome to ride the Keihin-Tohoku Line 15 minutes to Shinagawa and buy the game there. It's a curious move – it took Japan a year to catch up on the prostitute-killing spree that is *GTA*, and though no kids have yet killed other kids in *GTA*-related



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON THIRTY FIVE	GROWING A BEARD
Uwa! Hige da, hige!	Whoa! A beard, you've got a beard!
Souda. Ikinari haechatta.	Yeah. It just sprouted up all of a sudden.
Donogurai kakacchatta no?	How long did it take?
Jitsu wa, ettou… ni shuukan gurai kana?	Actually, about… two weeks?
Yoku dekitane, omae, yatto otona ni nattan dane. Donna kibun?	Good work there, dude, you've finally become a man. How does it feel?
Ka… kayui kibun.	It feels… itchy.

MINORS. MINORS ARE NOW AND BUY THE GAME THERE"

newspaper stories, they must figure better safe than sorry. The 18+ rating distinction was created specifically for *GTA* and the Japanese have been adamant about not using it for anything else. Until *killer7*, which got the 18+ rating and sold rather poorly. So, out of nowhere, *Genji* gets the 18+. After playing the game, I wonder why. Because it has blood? No more than *Onimusha*, only now it's teaching history lessons too.

My friend at Sony claims to know the reason *Genji* has been a hit: Sony's just now getting around to dealing with the non-gamer-yet-PS2-owner market. Okamoto's involvement guarantees that hardcore game fans are going to play *Genji*; it's the historical tale, the ads with a famous baseball player and the packaging, which doesn't look like a game box at all, which will lure in one of those tens of millions of Japanese who own a PS2 and never use it to play games. And then they'll beat the game in six hours. Damn, it's an easy one.

Kind regards

Tim Rogers

MIYAMOTO MUSASHI WAS A FAKE?!

I make a big deal about how *Genji* is not based on *The Tale Of Genji* in this month's column, and I stick by my word. However, the game takes so many liberties with the historical source material it's so proud of that it's kind of depressing. What was once a historical princess and love interest, for example, is now a white-haired anime girl who sits in her chamber and saves your game, or fuses together two magic orbs whenever you collect them.

Most bizarre of all is Yoshitsune's fighting style. For one thing, he doesn't use a bow and arrows (From Software's Yoshitsune game is all about the bow); for another thing, he uses two swords. This is a big, terrible mistake. While warriors in Japan carried two swords for a long time, to use both of them at once is just plain unheard of prior to the early 17th Century, when the ronin Musashi Miyamoto invented the style and was despised for it. Yoshitsune's use of the Musashi style in 1129 is a laughable historical inaccuracy. Damned if he don't kick ass with it, though.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Sakura Wars V	Sega	PS2
2	Gentle Brain Exercises	Nintendo	DS
3	Everybody Loves Katamari	Namco	PS2
4	Musashi: Samurai Legend	Square Enix	PS2
5	Mushiking: Greatest Champion	Sega	GBA
6	Gundam: True Odyssey	Bandai	PS2
7	DS Training For Adults	Nintendo	DS
8	Kenran Butou Sai	SCEJ	PS2
9	Genji	SCEJ	PS2
10	Star Wars Episode III: ROTS	Electronic Arts	PS2

(Week ending 10/07/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

PARENTAL LOCK 'N' LOAD



There's been another bout of stories linking games and either death or injury, and they all paint a bleak picture of gaming that seems a world away from my favourite hobby/job.

We can argue 'til we're blue in the face that 'games don't kill people, people kill people' but the message doesn't seem to be sinking in. It doesn't sell as many papers, does it?

Children are playing adult games. We all know this is happening and I think it's fair to say it's not a rare occurrence. Just survey the age of *GTA* fans to see what I mean. Nobody seems to be taking responsibility for this situation. So I propose the next generation of console hardware include a parental locking system.

As the game boots up it declares its age rating to the console. The console checks its settings and if the game is rated 'adults only' in its code then the console asks for the parental unlock code. No code, no game.

This would require parents to perform a single responsible act of turning parental locking on or off in the console's system settings. After that, it's all down to the game and the console talking to each other. With consoles having regional lock-out procedures in them as standard as well as customisable system settings, I can't see that putting a system like this into the hardware would be too difficult.

We'd still end up with taboo games desired by those who aren't meant to play them. A motivated 14-year-old will still find a way to play 'Blood Master Extreme', of that I'm sure.

Of course, it still wouldn't address the problem of kids stabbing their siblings after repeatedly losing at *The Incredibles*, but it's a start.

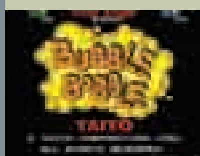
Mr X might be worn down by the games industry, but he still has some good ideas. Occasionally.

FROM THE FRONT

TAITO FEELS THE PINCH AS ARCADE TAKINGS FALL, WHILE JAPANESE GAMERS STILL DON'T LIKE XBOXES…



Taito is responsible for some of arcade gaming's true classics, bless it.



It's sad to see arcades in decline around the world.



TOUGH TIMES FOR TAITO

ARCADE EXPENSES BLAMED FOR PROFIT DROP-OFF

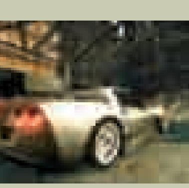
Poor old Taito – despite having a fairly healthy time of it in the world of Japanese games developers, recent reports indicate that it has suffered a significant drop in overall profit. The company, responsible for such arcade greats as the *Bubble Bobble* franchise and the original *Space Invaders*, suffered a net profit loss of ¥1.8 billion, meaning this year it only made ¥1.7 billion compared to last year's ¥3.5 billion. Despite this loss, however, the company posted net sales of ¥84.6 billion, an increase of 1.9 per cent from the last financial year.

So what has caused such a downturn in fortunes for one of the arcade business's biggest names? Taito's president, Yasuo Nishigaki, blames the rising costs of arcade openings, upgrades and capital expenses for the firm's loss, even though it increased the number of coin-operated machines sold. Nishigaki also blamed the losses on extreme weather conditions such as heat waves, typhoons and earthquakes.

While the company's downturn may indeed be down to unavoidable acts of God then, it's common knowledge that arcades have suffered globally since home console technology came into line with its arcade brethren. Gone are the days of dreaming about an 'arcade-perfect port' – such things are now merely assumed. In fact, Taito has had to recently close 22 small gaming arcades after they failed to pull in profits.

All is not lost, however. Taito is determined to fight back on the arcade front. It has opened 14 larger arcades in commercial complexes, and has recruited 30 new staff to its research and development division. Also, by introducing arcade racer *Battle Gear 4* this summer, Taito hopes that arcade profits will once again stabilise. The firm also still intends to bring the magnificent *Half-Life 2* to Japanese arcades later this year.

If Taito's success matches its ambition in the coming year, then the arcades should be around for a little while yet.



It seems that Japanese gamers are still not taking to 'gaijin' products such as the Xbox 360.



JAPANESE RESEARCH SUGGESTS MICROSOFT MAY STRUGGLE

OUR SURVEY SAYS…

A new survey from Japan suggests that consumers in the home of Sony and Nintendo are still not interested in Microsoft's forthcoming Xbox 360, with only two per cent of respondents choosing the machine as their favourite next-gen console.

The survey asked 1,000 Japanese consumers, aged between 10 and 59, what their most anticipated next-gen console was; unsurprisingly, Sony came out convincingly on top with PlayStation3 grabbing 60 per cent of the votes. Nintendo came in second with eight per cent voting for the Revolution.

Microsoft will continue to pursue this lucrative market, however. It's been snapping up developer support, signing titles from Japanese studios Mist Walker, Game Republic and Q Entertainment. In the age of the fanboy it seems unfair that Japanese gamers are often let off the hook for ignoring a machine based on aesthetic principles. Still, the survey is far from indicative of sales, and Microsoft will remain positive as it moves towards Xbox 360's launch.



> "TAITO'S BOSS **ALSO BLAMED THE LOSSES ON** EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS **SUCH AS HEAT WAVES AND TYPHOONS"**

TAITO NET PROFIT (¥BILLION)

3.5, 3.0, 2.5, 2.0, 1.5, 1.0, 0.5, 0.0

2003/4 2004/5

IT'S SQUARE TO BE HIP

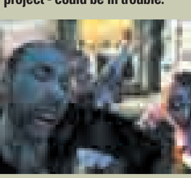
CANADIAN PUBLISHER GOES UNDER

Publishing house Hip Interactive has closed its Canadian operation after last-minute talks failed to save it. According to a statement from the firm, "discussions with a third party to provide interim relief in respect of the company's immediate financing needs were not successful." As the company attempted to find a solution to its financial problems, the main investor – Congress Financial Corp – requested the Ontario-based firm file for bankruptcy.

However, it's not all bad news for Hip as its European branch is to remain active. "Hip Interactive Europe will pursue its activities as a publisher, a distributor, as well as a peripheral provider," said a Hip press release, which means we can look forward to such titles as *Garfield – Saving Arlene*. Joy.

The closure of the Canadian office leaves a number of titles up for grabs, with other publishers being able to buy the US rights to *City Of The Dead* and *Jackie Chan Adventures*. A similar fate befell *Juiced* when Acclaim went bust, and after being bought by THQ it hit the number one spot in the UK charts, so a savvy publisher might be eyeing these titles as a potentially easy success.

City Of The Dead - George Romero's first videogame project - could be in trouble.



Hip's UK arm, however, still insists that it's business as usual for them…

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Madagascar	Activision	Multi
2	Brian Lara Int. Cricket 2005	Codemasters	Multi
3	Fantastic Four	Activision	Multi
4	Medal Of Honor: European Assault	EA Games	Multi
5	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Multi
6	Cricket 2005	EA Sports	Multi
7	Juiced	THQ	Multi
8	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Xbox
9	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	Multi
10	God Of War	SCEE	PS2

The curse of the mediocre film licences strikes again, although Activision's ad campaigns (packed with rendered cutscenes rather than actual in-game footage as they are) must have helped…

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 23 July 2005)



Juiced

Destroy All Humans!

God Of War

RELEASE LISTS



F.E.A.R. PC Think the FPS genre is getting dull? Tell that to him.

Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana PS2 The most traditional RPG we've seen in a while.

GUN Multi "You don't wanna see my hand where my hip be at…"

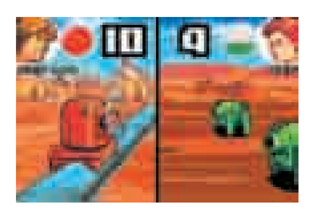


MOST PLAYED

FAMICOM WARS DS

Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo

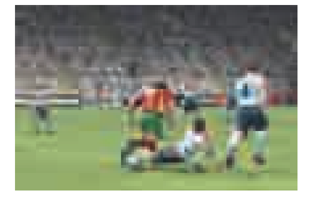
Strategy is good. Cute colourful tanks are good. What better, then, than a game that combines the two? (Aside from a mountain of fresh cream cakes served by a talking unicorn waiter, obviously.) Will we ever tire of war? At this point, it seems rather doubtful, particularly when it looks this good and is so damn addictive.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: Konami

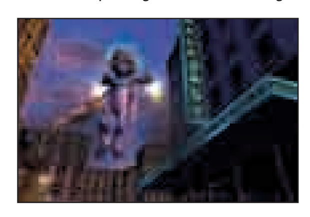
By the time you read this, we'll be away from our desks dreaming up every excuse under the sun to justify just one more game of *Winning Eleven 9* – we just hope the time invested into *Pro Evo 4* by way of training pays off.



DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: THQ

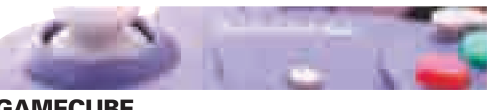
Pandemic's tongue-in-cheek shooter is a dream come true for *Invader Zim* fans like us – a great game in its own right made all the more entertaining by a sterling voice-over job and a healthy dollop of silliness. Levelling entire towns is quite good stress relief, you know, though the probing can be less relaxing…





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST '05			
12 August	Sprint Car Challenge	Liquid Games	
12 August	The Great British Football Quiz	Liquid Games	
26 August	Gametrak: Real World Golf	In2Games	
26 August	187 Ride Or Die	Ubisoft	
26 August	Total Overdose	SCi	
TBC	Anubis: Curse Of The Pharaoh	Midas	
TBC	DICE	Bandai	
TBC	Golden Age Of Racing	Midas	
TBC	International Super Karts	Midas	
TBC	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi	
TBC	Top Spin	2K Sports	
SEPTEMBER '05			
2 September	Aquanox – The Angel's Tears	JoWooD	
9 September	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Brave: The Search For Spirit Dancer	Sony	
TBC	Colosseum: Road To Freedom	Koei	
TBC	Crime Life: Gang Wars	Konami	
TBC	Evil Dead Regeneration	THQ	
TBC	EyeToy: Kinetic	Sony	
TBC	Genji	Sony	
TBC	Heroes Of The Pacific	Codemasters	
TBC	SpyToy	Sony	
TBC	Resident Evil Outbreak File 2	Capcom	
TBC	Samurai Showdown V	Ignition	
TBC	SOCOM 3: US Navy SEALs	Sony	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Dead To Rights II	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5	Koei	
TBC	The Warriors	Rockstar	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Phantom Kingdom	Koei	Wanted
TBC	Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Pilot Down: Behind Enemy Lines	Oxygen	
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	
TBC	50 Cent: Bulletproof	Vivendi	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	Rogue Trooper	SCi	
TBC	Scarface: The World is Yours	Vivendi	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	True Crime 2	Activision	
TBC	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted



GAMECUBE

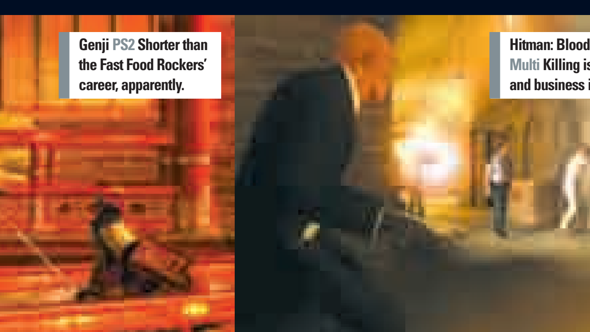
Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST '05			
TBC	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi	
TBC	Madden NFL 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
SEPTEMBER '05			
9 September	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Mario Baseball	Nintendo	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	
TBC	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Namco	
TBC	187 Ride Or Die	Ubisoft	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	WWE Day Of Reckoning 2	THQ	
TBC	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Dancing Stage: Mario Mix	Nintendo	
Q4 '05			
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Geist	Nintendo	
TBC	Fire Emblem: Path Of Radiance	Nintendo	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST 05			
19 August	Pilot Down: Behind Enemy Lines	Oxygen	
26 August	187 Ride Or Die	Ubisoft	
26 August	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike	Ubisoft	
29 August	Total Overdose	SCi	
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Vivendi	
TBC	Dead To Rights II	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Madden NFL 06	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
SEPTEMBER '05			
2 September	MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology 3	THQ	Wanted
9 September	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Crime Life: Gang Wars	Konami	
TBC	Evil Dead Regeneration	THQ	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

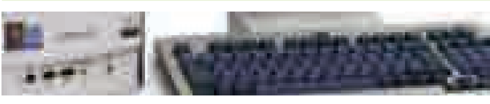

Genji PS2 Shorter than the Fast Food Rockers' career, apparently.


Hitman: Blood Money Multi Killing is his business and business is good.


Coded Arms PSP First PSP FPS in 'slightly dodgy' shocker.

Guitar Hero PS2 Funny looking fat bloke plays guitar. We laugh.

Q3 '05			
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	Wanted
TBC	Heroes Of The Pacific	Codemasters	
TBC	Timeshift	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	
TBC	50 Cent: Bulletproof	Vivendi	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	Rogue Trooper	SCi	
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	Vivendi	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Activision	
TBC	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Wanted
TBC	True Crime 2	Activision	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST '05			
19 August	Neuro Hunter	Deep Silver	
19 August	Chrome Specforce	Deep Silver	
26 August	Earth 2160	Deep Silver	
29 August	Total Overdose	SCi	
TBC	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
TBC	Dungeon Lords	Mindscape	
SEPTEMBER '05			
2 September	Blitzkrieg 2	CDV	
2 September	MotoGP: URT3	THQ	Wanted
2 September	TAXI 3: Extreme Rush	Fusion Labs	
9 September	ER	Mindscape	
9 September	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Namco	
30 September	X3: Reunion	Deep Silver	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	Crime Life: Gang Wars	Konami	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Timeshift	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Age Of Pirates	1C Company	
TBC	Pilot Down: Behind Enemy Lines	Oxygen	
TBC	Neverend	Dusk2Dawn	
TBC	Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Spartan: Total Warrior	Sega	
TBC	Rise And Fall: Civilizations At War	Midway	
TBC	Starship Troopers	Empire	
TBC	Preyground	Frozenbyte	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	Vivendi	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	Wanted

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST '05			
16 August	Sigma Star Saga	Namco	
29 August	Dynasty Warriors Advance	Nintendo	
TBC	Namco Museum	Namco	
TBC	Shaman King: Master Of Spirits 2	Konami	
TBC	Gundam Seed: Battle Assault	Bandai	
TBC	Gumby Vs. The Astrobots	Namco	
SEPTEMBER '05			
6 September	One Piece!	Bandai Games	
TBC	Tokyo Xtreme Racer Advance	Crave	
TBC	Ultimate Spider-Man	Activision	
TBC	Super Robot Monkey Team Hyperforce Go!	Buena Vista	
Q3 '05			
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Elf: The Movie	TBC	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
Q3 '05			
1 September	Lumines	Sony	Wanted
1 September	WipEout Pure	Sony	Wanted
1 September	Ridge Racer	Sony	Wanted
1 September	Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Wanted
1 September	MediEvil: Resurrection	Sony	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4 Mobile	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Death Jr.	Konami	
TBC	Infected	TBC	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe VFX Battle	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	World Rally Championship	Sony	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	
TBC	50 Cent: Bulletproof	Vivendi	
TBC	BloodRayne PSP	Majesco	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Namco	
TBC	Star Wars Battlefront II	LucasArts	Wanted
TBC	Coded Arms	Konami	
TBC	Bounty Hounds	Namco	
TBC	PoPoLoCrois	Agetec	
TBC	Ghost In The Shell: Stand Alone Complex	Atari	

NINTENDO DS

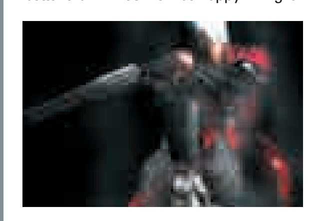
Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST '05			
TBC	Lost In Blue	Konami	
TBC	Blades Of Thunder 2	Summitsoft	
TBC	Nanostray	Majesco	Wanted
SEPTEMBER '05			
9 September	Zoo Tycoon	THQ	
30 September	Advance Wars: Dual Strike	Nintendo	Wanted
Q3 '05			
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh!: Nightmare Troubadour	Konami	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe Scratch!	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Lunar Genesis	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Vandal Hearts	Konami	Wanted

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

Format: PlayStation3
Publisher: Capcom
With Dante Must Die mode all but over, we've already started looking forward to the son of Sparda's next outing. Sure, the E3 trailer didn't exactly give anything away but *Devil May Cry 3* was proof enough for us that the series really is back on the right track. If it can go just one better than *DMC3* we'll be happy. Bring it.



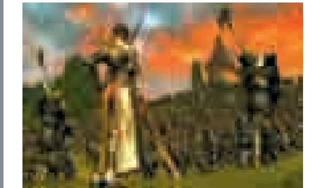
THE GODFATHER

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: EA
Considering the cringes, snide comments and general cynicism that surrounded the announcement of EA's latest untimely movie tie-in, the videogame version of Coppola's quintessential mob movie seems to be doing alright Let's just hope it lives up to expectations…



NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Microsoft
We like Phantagram. With the Korean developer proving its mastery of the Xbox with the *Kingdom Under Fire* games, the firm's 360 debut looks even more impressive. The mere idea of battles involving 20,000-odd soldiers and the ability to amass a four-figure body count with a single spell makes us rather happy.





If he dies, he dies… **Body Blows – Amiga [Team 17] 1993**


CPU
0

FRIGHTENING. PETRIFYING. CHILLING. THE NEW DEFINITION OF FPS GAMING

F.E.A.R.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER: Monolith
RELEASE: Oct '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16

CONCEPT

Part all-out action blaster and part psychological horror, *F.E.A.R.* never relinquishes its grip while you play, whether you're spraying bullets or trembling with terror.

HISTORY

Based on ideas created some seven years ago after Monolith finished *Shogo*, the developer's aim of making players feel like the hero of an action movie appears to have been realised.

During the day that we spent playing *F.E.A.R.*, tucked away in a quiet corner of west London, we found ourselves getting increasingly annoyed. Strangely though, it wasn't because of the game, but more the people around us as Monolith's creation drew us further into its world. Drifting in and out of the room like spectres at regular intervals, each would sit and play the game for 20 minutes before muttering a quick "Yeah, it looks alright…" and stumbling back out into the softly lit hall in time for lunch.

To accuse them of missing the point entirely would be an understatement of monumental proportions. Yes, so it's perfectly possible to play the game for a short period of time – but when it comes to *F.E.A.R.* there's a vast gulf between simply playing the game and actually appreciating what it achieves.

"I wouldn't say the FPS genre is becoming stale, but *F.E.A.R.* is giving us an opportunity to explore a different kind of narrative that you don't find often within the genre," says Rob Loftus, the game's producer. "The first-person perspective is well suited for action, but also for storytelling. First and foremost, we want the player to feel like they are in an action movie with gameplay that lets them feel the thrill of a close-quarters firefight. However, the psychological aspect of *F.E.A.R.* shares the same cinematic feel from a narrative sense rather than an action sense; it's a more mature approach to storytelling."

Even though the continual switching between frantic firefights, shudder-inducing silences and gradual story advancement sounds like a jarring combination, it's this decidedly schizophrenic personality that makes *F.E.A.R.* genuinely special. However, that's where our increasing frustration with other previewers comes into it.

Play *F.E.A.R.* for as little as, say, 30 minutes and you'll leave with some fairly generic impressions; the basics of exactly why your nameless character and his team (the First Encounter Assault Recon of the title) are infiltrating a faceless industrial compound, an idea of how vicious the enemy AI can be combined with how you can't just run around spraying bullets everywhere, and, possibly Monolith's worst-kept secret, the presence of a little girl with a penchant for ripping people to



"THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIDE OF F.E.A.R. IS PARTICULARLY STRONG, CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE THAT'LL HAVE YOU PEERING ROUND EVERY CORNER"



■ Even the highly trained SWAT team you work with can't stand up to this horror…

shreds without actually touching them. It's enough, certainly, to pique your interest, but nowhere near what the game intends. The truth of it is that *F.E.A.R.* is genuinely unsettling. Over extended periods of time the game gets under your skin in a number of ways, to the point where you're creeping through the corridors that lie before you to try to prevent anything catching you off guard.

Not surprisingly, however, even that tactic doesn't work – Monolith has planned far enough ahead to ensure that even the most careful player is going to be on the edge of, and even jumping out of, their seat on more than one occasion. But that's not to say that the game is based entirely on cheap shocks; it's the complete lack of them that's more unsettling. "There are a lot of different ways to scare an audience," says Craig Hubbard, *F.E.A.R.*'s lead game designer, "but I find the most effective ones to be those that leave something to the imagination. Part of what I responded to when I first saw the film *Dark Water* was the fact that we never see the little girl's face, which creates a degree of tension that no production designer's most nightmarish concepts could ever match. Once you see the monster for what it is, it's easy to overanalyse it to the point that it's no longer scary. The brilliance of *Alien* was that you only got brief glimpses of dripping jaws and monstrous shadows on the wall. As great as the creature design is, what I imagined was far more disturbing and that's the real trick."

"IT'S A SCHIZOPHRENIC GAME OF EPIC PROPORTIONS – ONE MINUTE IT'S FRANTIC BLASTING, THE NEXT YOU'RE SCARED WITLESS"

Indeed, *F.E.A.R.* leaves much to the imagination as far as its scares go – and that's not just because Monolith's lips are sealed regarding the game's extensive and twisting narrative. As the game begins, virtually nothing is known about your character (who you are, why you've come to be part of the First Encounter Assault Recon team and so on), which makes the psychic flashbacks and other bizarre visions he has all the more disturbing.

Comrades who only seconds before were issuing orders and keeping point soon start screaming once you lose sight of them, only to turn up as charred skeletons later on. Corners turned reveal flickers of something (or someone) in the distance, shadows play across walls, people appear right in front of you for the briefest of moments and things that you might take for enemies literally disintegrate before your eyes… All fairly standard scare tactics, you might think, but ones that are incredibly effective thanks to the understated way that Monolith has implemented them.

It's not all subtlety, silence and static-filled radio bursts of little girls' laughter though – the game has its fair share of Jerry Bruckheimer moments too, albeit with a horror slant. Corridors that erupt ▷

SUGAR, SPICE AND ALL THINGS NICE

It's very easy to draw parallels between *F.E.A.R.*'s supernatural stylings and films such as *The Ring*, *Dark Water* and *Don't Look Now* simply because of little girl Alma, the first (but most certainly not the last) element of the game's scare-driven plot revealed so far. Not surprisingly, the team at Monolith cite such movies as some of their favourites, but they're keen to make it clear that *F.E.A.R.* isn't going to be a knock-off that'll ultimately leave fans disappointed. "Most action games have largely overlooked ghosts in favour of zombies, demons, aliens and mutants," says Craig Hubbard, "so it's a great opportunity for us to explore a completely different style of suspense and dread. At the same time, we're trying not to rely too heavily on any specific source of inspiration so that we can still surprise people who have seen all the movies we have."



HORROR PROFILE

■ Games based in the realm of horror have come a long way over the years. Initially heavy on the pixelated gore, they've since discovered more atmospheric and psychological means of frightening players. Interestingly, *Night Trap* was as psychologically demanding as it was gory… but only because it was a terrible, terrible game.

HISTORY

■ **RESIDENT EVIL** 1996 [PSone]
■ **NIGHT TRAP** 1993 [Mega CD]
■ **CHILLER** 1986 [Arcade]

■ So, you're in front of a freaky little girl in a burning corridor. Shouldn't you be running?

"IN F.E.A.R. WHAT SCARES YOU MOST IS WHAT YOU DON'T ACTUALLY SEE – WE LET THE PLAYER'S IMAGINATION CREATE THE TENSION"
ROB LOFTUS, PRODUCER, VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SHE'S BEHIND YOU…

SERIOUS SAM + FORBIDDEN SIREN x SECRET PLOT = F.E.A.R.

■ We'd say 'She's behind you' but it's a bit late for that now, don't you think?



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Monolith has done little wrong during its ten years in existence; virtually all of its games have been of a high quality, giving it a reputation that's well deserved. Having recently passed the demands of *Matrix Online* onto Sony Online Entertainment, the developer has now refocused its attentions on creating first-person action titles.

HISTORY

- **CONDEMNED** 2005 [Xbox 360]
- **THE MATRIX ONLINE** 2005 [PC]
- **TRON 2.0** 2003 [PC]

■ *F.E.A.R.*'s use of stand-out action movie moments really invigorates the atmosphere.

"WATCHING A DRIVING STUNT IN A MOVIE IS BREATHTAKING, BUT ACTUALLY BEING IN THE PASSENGER SEAT TAKES YOU TO A WHOLE OTHER LEVEL"
CRAIG HUBBARD, LEAD GAME DESIGNER, MONOLITH

■ The enemy AI is genuinely impressive, not to mention scary, in the way it reacts to you.


When Monolith raves about *F.E.A.R.*'s destructible environment, it has good reason.

with flames as you sprint down them, ceilings flowing with blood, explosions that throw you through windows… clearly, the intention to make the player feel like they're at the heart of an action movie is one that Monolith has taken very seriously here.

"We wanted to create some spectacle sequences that would give players the same kind of adrenaline rush audiences get from the causeway car chase in *Bad Boys II* or the helicopter crash sequence in *The Matrix*," says Hubbard. "The great thing about games is that because you're participating in the events, it's easy to become that much more involved in the experience. Watching a stuntman do a corkscrew jump in a movie is breathtaking, but being in the passenger seat takes you to a whole other level."

While storytelling is a crucial element of *F.E.A.R.* though, the game is an FPS at its core – to this end, there are plenty of scares of a different kind to be found within the action segments of the game. The feeling of just how vulnerable you can be, for instance, plays an important role; health points vanish in a heartbeat if you attempt to rush enemies carelessly, and ammunition, usually a plentiful commodity in an FPS, is somewhat scarce for a game packed with this much danger.

The enemies, too, have the ability to raise your pulse simply through how intelligent and ferocious they appear to be; once you've seen them moving from cover to cover in order to get a better angle, ducking, rolling and diving to escape any assault you may lay down, even causing distractions from one direction while their cohorts (called in from nearby if you happen to be spotted) flank you from another, it becomes clear that the usual approach of running and gunning doesn't apply to *F.E.A.R.*'s gameplay.

Instead, the focus is on remaining hidden whenever possible, isolating single enemies to avoid detection, using the variety of melee attacks on offer and, when things really do go wrong, using your slow-motion abilities to lay siege to the horde of soldiers coming your way. As we said, it's a tension of a different kind that, combined with the eerie silences and shocks, creates an atmosphere that goes beyond the generic horror that games like *Doom 3* have presented in the past.

But then, you can't tell all this from just 30 minutes of play. Even a solid day of exposure to the game, culminating in Vivendi representatives having to turn the machine off in order to stop you playing, only reveals glimpses of Monolith's true intentions. The facts, however, are clear: as an FPS, *F.E.A.R.* is incredibly solid and capable, and we've even got faith in the developer's ability to deliver enough horror – gore-laden or otherwise – to help drive the game forwards. As such, only one question remains unanswered: will we need one cushion to hide behind while playing it, or a whole sofa?

HERE COMES THE SCIENCE BIT

Interestingly, *F.E.A.R.* is one of the first Monolith titles in a while not to use the developer's home-grown LithTech engine; instead, the team created an entirely new technology engine to help build the game they wanted. "We've found the best way to develop technology is to first define the game and then identify what specific technology would best allow for its creation," says John O'Rorke, engine architect at Monolith. "We wanted lots of intense gunfights with dramatic and dynamic results, such as shattering glass, showers of sparks, and debris flying through the air. In addition, we wanted top-of-the-line graphics and technology we could continue to extend and improve upon for the future." The results speak for themselves, especially once you find yourself in the middle of an all-out firefight – scenery crumbles amid the bullets, enemies respond realistically as you shoot them and so on. Combine this with some particularly impressive lighting, character rendering and physics, and you've got a game that easily gives *Half-Life 2* a run for its money.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

While melee combat doesn't play nearly as big a role in *F.E.A.R.* as it does in *Condemned* (Monolith's big Xbox 360 title), the developer has still managed to incorporate a system of moves that can give the player an advantage over their opponents. Ammunition is limited so you'll have to resort to taking down enemies in other ways on more than one occasion – for instance, running, jumping and then pressing the right mouse button initiates a three-hit flying kick that can take down or even kill an enemy if it's done properly, while running and hitting crouch and the right mouse button simultaneously delivers a sliding kick that will silently disable anyone in your way. "Initially, there was a fair amount of scepticism about how fighting would feel in first person," admits Craig Hubbard, "but the results were promising enough that we decided to develop a context-driven system that lets you perform different manoeuvres simply by aiming at an enemy's face or legs. The key was to give the player an interesting array of attacks but keep the interface simple and intuitive."

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS



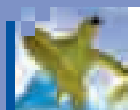
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"WITHOUT GOLIATH, DAVID'S JUST A PUNK THROWING ROCKS"

HORSE RIDING + CLIMBING x GIANTS = SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

"SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS WILL CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS AND PUSH ACTION ADVENTURE GAMING EVEN FURTHER"
SCEE PRESS RELEASE

■ Your faithful steed does more than just carry you – he'll help you fight Colossi.

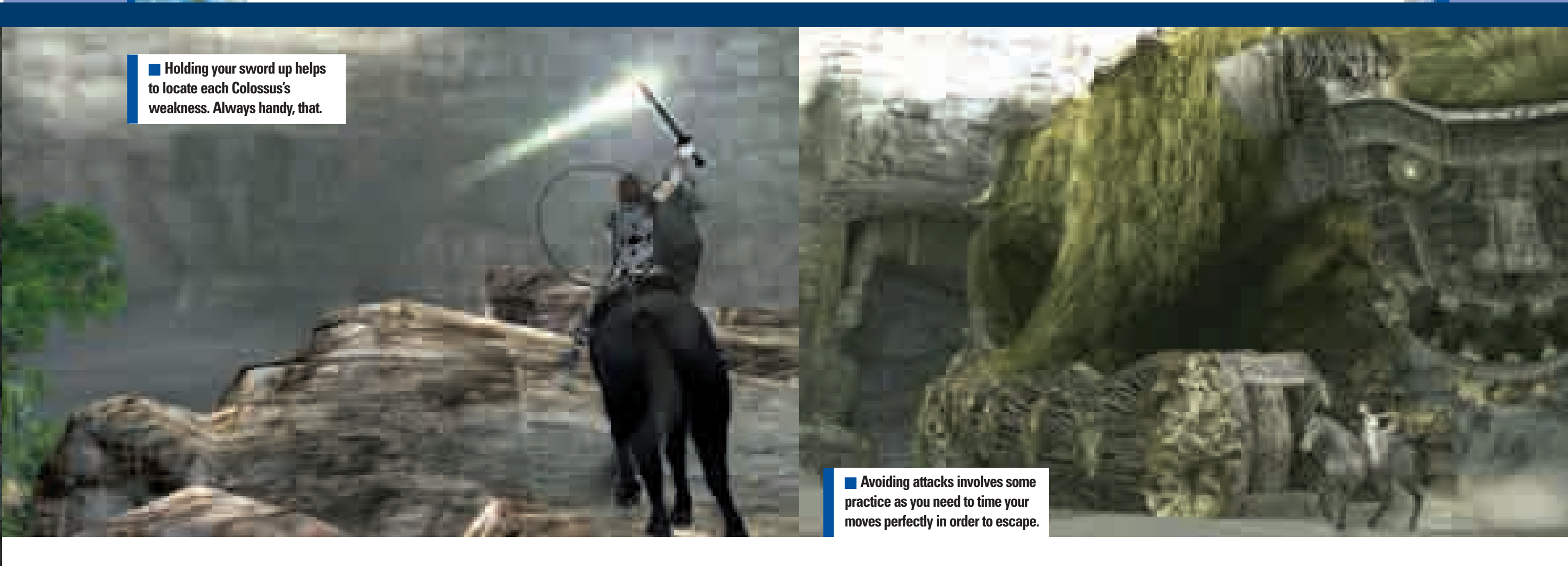


GIANT PROFILE

Shadow Of The Colossus goes against the rules of gigantism in games – usually, those that do feature such monstrosities see you as the oversized brute terrorising the little people, rather than the other way round. Such placement does grant a feeling of power, although it's always nice to overcome the odds every once in a while.

HISTORY

- DOSHIN THE GIANT 2002 [Cube]
- BLACK & WHITE 2001 [PC]
- GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO 2000 [PC]



Holding your sword up helps to locate each Colossus's weakness. Always handy, that.

Avoiding attacks involves some practice as you need to time your moves perfectly in order to escape.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '06 (Japan: Q4 '05)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

It's another potential jewel for Sony Japan's crown: all the elegance and beauty of *Ico*, but with another challenging and uniquely gigantic concept underneath.

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

In an industry where soundbites and snappy one-liners are what marketing dreams are made of, *Shadow Of The Colossus* defies fair description. To sum it up in a few words would do the game a massive injustice. Is it 'epic'? Of course it is – not just because of the colossi of the title, but also because of the sprawling landscapes you have to cross on foot and on horseback in order to reach them. 'Inspired'? Definitely – while the concept of playing David to boss Goliaths isn't new, the method of dealing with them here certainly is. 'Beautiful'? Absolutely – the screens on these pages (albeit 'enhanced' ones rather than genuine as-played shots) tell you that immediately.

But *Colossus* is even more than all that. Just beginning your journey as the valiant hero, out to save the soul of a lifeless young beauty, is breathtaking in itself – there's so much to see, to explore, to admire about this world created by Fumito Ueda and his team. Even the landscapes that lie between you and your gigantic prey look incredible despite being barren; galloping across them on your trusty steed, Agro, sword aloft to light your way, invokes a tremendous feeling of adventure as you race to slay yet another behemoth.

Using your sword as something other than a weapon is a key part of the game. Holding it up in sunny areas creates a beam of light that indicates where the next Colossus lies; however, this guidance won't take into account obstacles between you and the Colossus (caves, forests, lakes or man-made barriers) so overcoming those is up to you. It's here that the *Ico* comparisons come to the fore, with the nameless hero having to negotiate his way over, under and around whatever's in his way. Our experience of this has so far been limited (a simple cliff presented only a minor challenge), so we're already excited about the other environments being held back for the final game.

Evidently, all this is but the prelude for the crux of the game: taking down the Colossi themselves. Once again, the sword's guidance comes into play, pointing out each giant's weakness, although reaching weak spots presents its own challenges. The monster we faced, for instance – a hulking brute with a sword that could squash you in a single swipe – seems easy to destroy thanks to the protrusions running up his back to the vulnerable spot on top of his flat head. But you're noticed as soon as you grasp the hairs on the back of his legs and the Colossus does his best to shake you off.

> "MUCH OF THIS GAME'S ELEGANCE COMES FROM HOW CREATIVE IT IS WITH SUCH A SIMPLE CONCEPT"

The on-screen strength indicator gives an idea of how good your hero's grip is, and it's essential to keep it topped up; platforms can help you recover, although even these aren't safe if you outstay your welcome. Hold on for too long and you'll be shaken free, leaving you to survive the drop to the ground… or not, as the case may be. Reach the top, however, and you can deliver the coup de grace: a series of sword blows that create a geyser of blood.

All this, of course, is just a taster. We've seen footage of airborne Colossi with our hero leaping from galloping steed to outstretched wing; plains that stretch as far as the eye can see; and all manner of horseback action. The briefest of plays, much like the briefest of words, isn't enough to fully appreciate the majesty of *Colossus*, but we don't want to dive in until the game's ready. Games like this are rare. It seems a shame to spoil it for the sake of curiosity.

THE SEQUEL THAT NEVER WAS

With its obvious similarities in terms of visual style, it's not surprising that many have branded *Shadow Of The Colossus* a sequel to *Ico*. Sony insists this isn't the case, but hints have still been made that there may be some ties between the two – for instance, the similar architecture and landscapes suggest that both could be taking place in the same world. However, the biggest clue lies within one particular trailer where a flash towards the end depicts a young man with horns similar to the lead character in *Ico*; are they one and the same? We don't want to know until we play the finished game, but it's certainly a possibility…

PERFECT DARK ZERO

GATHER ROUND THE OLD JOANNA

It wouldn't be hugely unfair to say that Rare has gone off the boil. Since the company moved from Nintendo to Microsoft a few years ago, it's had very few reputable titles to call its own. Sure, *Grabbed By the Ghoulies* was fun, but the recent *Conker* remake was hardly earth-shattering. It's all a far cry from the studio's N64 heyday. *GoldenEye*, *Jet Force Gemini* and *Banjo Kazooie* are all considered classics, as is the terrific *Perfect Dark*. Fans of heroine Joanna Dark have long spoken of a sequel as if it was some sort of gaming holy grail. And now, after four years in development, myth becomes reality with *Perfect Dark Zero* for Xbox 360.

Set in the year 2020, three years before the original *Perfect Dark*, *Zero* charges you with guiding Joanna Dark through the troubles that led to her situation in the original. As before, the action will take place in two very different ways. Those fond of action will undoubtedly opt for the classic first-person shooter way of doing things and *Perfect Dark Zero* promises plenty of hectic skirmishes throughout the 15 levels, but there'll also be a stealth side.

You'll actually be able to switch between a first- and third-person view whenever you feel like it, so whenever the opportunity for a bit of sneaking arises you can quickly adapt. In third person you'll be far nimbler and will suddenly acquire the ability to perform stealth kills and the agility to leap over obstacles. It's this variation in gameplay that set this prequel from the original N64 title, but it's also the most dangerous – hopefully, it'll be delivered with the same level of quality as the first-person sections.

As with any worthy hero who wishes to partake in a bit of industrial espionage, Miss Dark will have access to a range of gadgets to aid her when it comes to disposing of foes. X-ray vision and invisibility shields have already been shown, but it's the weaponry that's looking most interesting. We've all toted a gun that can fire regular rounds with a tug of one trigger and hurled grenades as a secondary function, but *Perfect Dark Zero* will present a tertiary fire mode giving you even greater tactical opportunities.

> "IT'S OBVIOUS THAT MUCH OF THE FOCUS IN PERFECT DARK ZERO WILL BE PLACED ON THE MULTIPLAYER"

With the lack of information regarding the single-player mode, it's obvious that much of the focus in *Zero* will be placed on the multiplayer aspects. The game will feature a flexible map system that will allow players to watch the action and jump in and out whenever they feel like it. You'll also be able to section off areas of the map, allowing you to create the perfect environment for the amount of players you have competing. And that's only the start – *Zero* will boast over 200 adjustable elements, enough to keep most people interested for several rainy afternoons.

Whether *Perfect Dark Zero* can topple *Halo 2* from its throne is questionable, but with the amount of effort that Microsoft is putting into the 360 online experience, this is certain to be one of the games that everyone will be playing when the machine is launched.

YOUR FACE OR MINE?

Rare is a company that's had plenty of good ideas in the past, but not all of them were fully realised. Something the company has spoken about before but that's never been achievable is scanning in your own face to use on your characters. Although plenty of games have had an array of sliders to help you create the perfect character, the next-gen machines will provide the opportunity for Rare to finally fulfil this plan and *Perfect Dark Zero* will give you the option of slapping your own face on your multiplayer character. Of course, this will present a rather disturbing situation where you're gunning down characters that look exactly like your friends. We can't wait until the papers get hold of that.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Rare
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-50 online)

CONCEPT

Go back to the beginning of the story and guide Joanna Dark through her early years and ensure she becomes the agent we remember from her N64 outing.



The 'lovely lady with guns' schtick is pretty tired, but we still have a thing for Joanna.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1985 by Chris and Tim Stamper, Rare has become one of the world's leading videogame developers. The company has been responsible some of the most popular games in history such as multimillion sellers like *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*.

HISTORY

- STARFOX ADVENTURES 2002 [Cube]
- PERFECT DARK 2000 [N64]
- DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 1994 [SNES]

■ X-ray vision is just one of the many nifty gadgets Joanna will get to use.

■ Thanks to the power of the 360, Joanna's looking better than ever.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

YOU'RE NO LONGER IN THE DARK

PERFECT DARK - AGE + POWER = PERFECT DARK ZERO

"PERFECT DARK ZERO MERGES THE EXCITEMENT AND INTRIGUE OF ITS PREDECESSOR WITH REVOLUTIONARY GAME DESIGN AND ONLINE PLAY"

RARE PRESS RELEASE

AUTO ASSAULT



Each race comes equipped with a full range of vehicles for every job imaginable.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

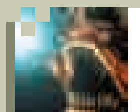
YOU DRIVE ME CRAZY

GUILD WARS + CARS x MAD MAX = AUTO ASSAULT

"FIGHT BANDITS AND MUTATED CREATURES AT BREAKNECK SPEED"

NCSOFT PRESS RELEASE

Although the characters may look pretty, it's the cars that are definitely the stars.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded in 1997 in Louisville, Kentucky, NetDevil has steadily grown from three part-timers to over 30 full-time developers, with development led by Scott Brown, Peter Grundy and Ryan Seabury. Interestingly, all the heads at NetDevil are qualified divers.

HISTORY

JUMPGATE 2001 [PC]



It's the speed of things that's likely to catch many out. You'll eventually get used to it though.

WHO'S GONNA DRIVE YOU HOME TONIGHT?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: NCsoft
DEVELOPER: NetDevil
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

CONCEPT

In a future where vehicles act as the primary weapon, join the humans, mutants or Biomechs and lead your race to victory.

If you're into online role-playing in a massively multiplayer kind of way, you've got a fair amount of choice at the moment. The genre has erupted recently and we're being treated to all manner of alternative existences. Whether you want to slay demons and dragons as an elfin ranger or save a city from certain doom while posing as a superhero, there's something out there for everyone if you take the time to look.

Thankfully though, NetDevil has really leapt outside the typical MMORPG box with *Auto Assault* and has ditched heroes and castles in favour of a post-apocalyptic world where you need a vehicle if you're to survive – anyone thinking about *Mad Max* right now is just about spot on.

Although *Auto Assault* will start out in a very traditional manner, with you selecting between three races and customising your humanoid avatar, you'll soon realise that things are going to play out very differently. The avatar you create at the start will only be useable in the town/hub areas and is fairly useless. It's when you venture outside these areas that the real game shows itself when you get your vehicle.

What vehicle you're given to control depends on your initial choices of race and profession, but no matter what you find yourself seated in, it'll be fast. This is the key difference between *Auto Assault* and other titles in the genre. The speed at which both travel and combat will take place is far greater than what you will have experienced in *Guild Wars* or *World Of Warcraft*, and this will mean that the ability to work closely with your party is essential from the off, unlike these other titles where you can normally just hammer away at enemies as a group with reasonable success throughout the opening stages.

Obviously taking note of the recent success that 'ride-pimping' games have enjoyed, *Auto Assault* not only gives you weapon and armour upgrades but will let you customise your vehicle from top to bottom. By picking up items dropped by enemies you can change almost every part of your transport from paint jobs through to tinted windows and rims. Of course, we're not talking about anything that can rival the likes of *NFSU2*, but for a game of this type it's certainly looking to be an impressive feature.

However, our main concern when we heard about this title seems to have been avoided. It's easy to create a balanced party of allies from a selection of generic fantasy types who are armed with swords and magic, but with armoured trucks and buggies involved we feared it would be far harder to create a working system. As it goes, NetDevil has addressed this problem well by separating the occupations in each race and ensuring each vehicle type mirrors one of the more familiar factions to which MMORPG fans can relate.

Auto Assault is certainly a risk for NCsoft. In order for the game to be a success, the existing MMORPG fan base is going to have to move away from what it knows and loves and take a chance on something that looks and feels slightly different from the norm. From what we've played, we can see the potential that the title possesses and, after the lessons learnt from the beta have been applied to the finished product, we could well see another great title from NCsoft.

"IT WON'T TAKE LONG TO REALISE THAT THIS RPG WILL PLAY OUT DIFFERENTLY TO THE NORM"

CREATURE COMFORTS

Thanks to an alien crash-landing the *Auto Assault* world is inhabited by three equally violent races: humans, mutants and Biomechs. You'll be asked to pick which side you wish to fight for as soon as you begin play and then, after selecting a profession that will suit your play style, get to customising your appearance. Of course, the problem with picking between three enemy races is that you can only team up with and play in a world inhabited by characters of the same species, so if you're planning on creating a party or guild with friends you should really make sure that you've all previously agreed on a side. That said, the introduction of multiple characters in the finished product could well lessen this problem.

GUITAR HERO

GENTLY WEEPING? WE DON'T THINK SO

PS2 **Getting to grips with a musical instrument is a tough thing for many people.** There are those who no matter how hard they try just can't master anything more complicated than a rattle. These people – who are often relegated to third triangle in school orchestras – will want to start writing their thank you letters to Harmonix. Although over the last year the developer has shifted its direction a little and brought us singing game *Karaoke Revolution* and – most recently – *EyeToy: AntiGrav*, its early titles such as *Frequency* and *Amplitude* provided those devoid of musical ability with a way to create reasonably pleasant noises. This charitable notion – to bring music to the inept – is what drives the studio's latest offering, *Guitar Hero*.

Guitar Hero will see Harmonix coming back to what it does best. Sure, it's not the *Amplitude* sequel that we've been longing for, but it certainly looks fairly similar gameplay-wise, and who knows, maybe it'll turn out to be an even greater title than any of the company's previous work.

A huge selling point for *Guitar Hero* is that it'll be neatly packed with its own controller – a guitar peripheral that seems to very similar to that used in *Guitar Freaks*. Five fret buttons and a strum bar will be your tools as you attempt to play the notes that are dropping down the screen and take your character on to the bigger, better venues. A missed note will see your life meter drop, whereas a string of perfect strums will gain you a little energy. It's the classic rhythm action game formula.

The main difference between this and many other games in the genre will be the fact that you'll need to perform two actions at once. Holding down the necessary buttons on the fret board with one hand while strumming out the rhythm with the other is no easy task, and unless you put in the hours on *Guitar Freaks* or can play a real guitar to some level this is going to test your abilities – well, more so than a bout of banging on some bongos will anyway.

> "HARMONIX HAS GIVEN THOSE DEVOID OF MUSICAL ABILITY A WAY TO CREATE REASONABLY PLEASANT NOISES"

The screenshots that are available at the moment certainly don't make the game look that taxing, but we're quite sure that once the tracks start getting unlocked and the difficulty levels rise we'll be giving our reflexes quite a workout. With games such as *Frequency* and *Amplitude* having already ruined our fingers, we're eager to see what Harmonix has got in store for us this time.

Although RedOctane has already signed up to publish *Guitar Hero* in the US, we're still waiting to find out who – if anyone – is going to handle it over here. Going on its previous relationship with Harmonix it seems that Sony may be a fair bet though, so let's hope it gets its act together soon. That said, it's unlikely we'll be waiting for the UK launch to get our hands on a copy. If there's jamming to be done, we'll be the first in the queue to take part, so expect an import review as soon as *Guitar Hero* gets released in the States.

NAME THAT TUNE

It's always preferable to play along to songs that you know and love rather than some unknown in-house music. So, as expected, *Guitar Hero* is to feature over 30 rock anthems for you to wig out to. These will include tracks from such greats as Red Hot Chili Peppers, David Bowie, Boston, The Donnas, Black Sabbath, The Ramones, White Zombie and Jimi Hendrix. Also, there's a competition running on the game's website that gives unsigned artists a chance to get their tunes in the game. We just hope it's more successful than when *FlatOut* tried the same idea last year – that really didn't turn out too well.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: TBC
DEVELOPER: Harmonix
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Rhythm Action
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

■ Awesome finger dexterity and rhythm are going to be essential as you attempt to accurately replicate the work of some of the finest rock artists in the world.



■ We really like the idea of having a 'Rock Meter' in the bottom right corner – real life should have one.

■ Judging by how much we like *Guitar Freaks*, we can't help but feel that we're going to love this.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Harmonix has been responsible for providing us with some of the greatest rhythm action titles ever. Even today *Amplitude* manages to spend much time in our PS2 and we still have our fingers crossed for a proper sequel. *Guitar Hero* will do for now, though.

HISTORY

- **ANTIGRAV** 2005 [PS2]
- **AMPLITUDE** 2003 [PS2]
- **FREQUENCY** 2002 [PS2]

As your status grows, so do the venues. You'll start out in crappy bars of course.

"PLAYERS WILL EXPERIENCE THE ESSENCE OF WHAT IT'S LIKE TO ACTUALLY PLAY SOME OF THE COOLEST ROCK SONGS OF ALL TIME"

JOHN TAM, PRODUCER, REDOCTANE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR

AMPLITUDE + ROCK + GUITARS = GUITAR HERO

SERIOUS SAM II



■ The monsters waiting for Sam are suitably big and comically scary.

■ Dual wielding – not the most original idea, but fitting in Sam's world.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SERIOUS NUMBERS

SERIOUS SAM x 100 + MORE ENEMIES = SERIOUS SAM II

"WE THINK FANS WILL AGREE THAT THE RETURN OF SAM HAS BEEN WELL WORTH THE WAIT"

CHRISTOPH HARTMANN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT PUBLISHING, 2K GAMES

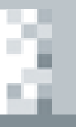


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Based in Croatia, Croteam is most famous for *Serious Sam*, one of the most popular games of 2001, which has since been ported to Xbox and GameCube. Before *Serious Sam*, Croteam worked on two football titles for the Amiga, which established it as a development presence.

HISTORY

- **SERIOUS SAM: THE SECOND ENCOUNTER** 2002 [PC]
- **SERIOUS SAM** 2001 [PC]
- **FOOTBALL GLORY** 1993 [Amiga]



CROTEAM GETS EVEN MORE SERIOUS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox
ORIGIN: Croatia
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Croteam
RELEASE: Q4 '05 (US: Autumn '05)
GENRE: Action Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-16

CONCEPT

The hotly anticipated sequel to Croteam's *Serious Sam*, this old-school, all-action FPS features even more ridiculous firepower, near-countless enemies and wry humour.

Serious Sam **was like an injection of pure adrenaline for PC first-person shooter fans in 2001.** Fast, furious and unrelentingly intense, the game blasted its way straight to the heart of the action FPS and made a star out of developer Croteam. Though the *Second Encounter* expansion whetted the appetites of fans, a true sequel is what everyone is really waiting for, and with a new engine capable of producing 100 times more detail than in the original game *Serious Sam II* is set to be a true evolution of the series.

While *Second Encounter* left Sam 'Serious' Stone floating in space on his way to the planet Sirius, *Serious Sam II* kicks off with a council of wizards asking him to collect the scattered remnants of a medallion needed to defeat the infamous Mental. This, of course, could not be more irrelevant. All that matters is that searching the galaxy for shards of medal lets Sam try out his extensive arsenal on seven worlds and over 40 levels' worth of enemies.

The original game was noted for the sheer number of enemies that could be displayed, and destroyed, on the screen at one time – in fact, it holds the world record for it. Not surprisingly, Croteam is aiming to surpass that, aiming to have around 200-300 enemies on-screen at a time, depending upon their size and nature.

Also new for *Serious Sam II* is vehicular combat. So far we've seen several bizarre modes of transport, from animals to surfboards to actual enemies. More conventional speed-bikes and plasma-armed, vaguely Ghost-like vehicles were also on show, but most of the fun is sure to come from using unlikely and ridiculous means to mow down incoming hordes.

And mowing down enemies is still the order of the day. While dual revolvers are still Sam's default weapon, the game features new devices alongside old favourites; the shotgun, cannon and grenade launcher are joined by plasma guns, dual machine guns and some slightly weirder weapons, including an air-strike parrot. Power-ups are also promised, though so far only Serious Strength, which is fairly self-explanatory, and Serious Disco (which infects enemies with 'Saturday night fever' and allows Sam free rein without fear of retaliation) have been revealed.

On the technical side, the *Serious II* engine lets Croteam create much more advanced visuals and physics effects. Though we're not exactly looking at *Half-Life 2* here, that the destructible scenery can be shot down and toppled onto enemies is immensely satisfying. However, you'll have to see the game moving to get a true sense of its speed and fluidity.

Croteam is adamant that the Xbox and PC versions of *Serious Sam II* will be the same in terms of content and online functionality. Presumably, however, PC users will have more success with the comprehensive and innovative level-editing options, which Croteam claims to be more powerful than those of *Half-Life 2*. Either way, it looks as if *Serious Sam II* will offer the fastest, most intense *Sam* experience so far.

> "MOST OF THE FUN WILL COME FROM USING UNLIKELY MEANS TO MOW DOWN ENEMIES"

BIGGER, BADDER, BETTER

The enemies in *Serious Sam II* are going to be more ridiculous, more numerous and much more sizeable than all that have gone before; a total of 45 newly remodelled monsters are included, including new versions of the Harpies, Headless Bombers and other favourites from the first game. True, the AI is still practically non-existent, but as *Serious Sam* is an action game with very little opportunity for strategy, that's not relevant. Some enemies, however, will act as commander units, giving other foes under their power slightly more intelligence. As far as bosses go, expect to meet a 200-metre-high gorilla called Qwongo and a Sumo wrestler with a penchant for opera singing. Sounds like Sam's going to need some very big guns…



Tombs – the mainstay of the FPS. Thankfully, there are other places to explore too.

PURSUIT FORCE



This is a typical sight in *Pursuit Force* – car-hopping shenanigans.

The city never sleeps when there are cars to be jumped on.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: BigBig Studios
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

A *Chase HQ* for the new millennium, only now there's a whole city to explore. Jumping between cars and onto helicopters is called for.

STARSKY AND HUTCH NEVER DID ANY OF THIS…

***Pursuit Force* doesn't try to hide its influences.** It's *Chase HQ* injected with a bucket-sized syringe of adrenaline, spruced up for the new millennium and speeding toward the PSP in time for the Christmas rush.

But how does *Pursuit Force* differ from its ancient uncle? The premise of the missions sounds awfully familiar: you work for the police, chasing down criminals on busy highways in a nondescript American city. However, *Chase HQ* never asked you to abandon your vehicle and spring across a lane of traffic onto the hood of a felon's car. Nor did *Chase HQ* provide an entire city – some 400 square kilometres – as a stage for its high-octane antics.

The car jumping needs to be seen to be believed. It's entirely possible for your "young, cocky, street tough cop" (Sony's words, not ours) to leap from his car to another and drop down below the bumper before hurling himself onto a speeding motorbike, burning up the highway towards the police helicopter, clambering on board and peppering the criminals with a chopper-mounted gun turret. This boy means business.

The PSP is perfectly suited to this kind of brainless action fare. Handheld gaming should be focused on delivering an intense burst of fun suitable for short gaming sessions. Early signs suggest *Pursuit Force* will hit this nail on the head. Spread out over 30 missions, it's a pure adrenaline game, with uncomplicated controls and a hassle-free interface.

Graphically, *Pursuit Force* is shaping up nicely. The sheer amount of action on screen makes for a slight knock in the detail department, but the game flows superbly with no drop in frame rate and a real sensation of speed. Our (currently nameless) cop can control myriad vehicles, from SUVs to flashy sports cars, each with their own unique handling models.

So it's all looking rather good. The only danger BigBig needs to avoid is the ever-dreaded stigma attached to many an action game – repetitiveness. As fun as it is to jump from car to car, will it stretch to a whole game? Hopefully the studio can do enough to prevent the title stagnating. If it can provide a varied experience that matches the initial awe of your character's fearlessness, PSP adopters should be in for a treat.



"CHASE HQ NEVER ASKED YOU TO LEAVE YOUR CAR AND LEAP ACROSS A LANE OF TRAFFIC"


eMag

PREY



The portals that tear through the fabric of the game's universe are superb

AN FPS BRIMMING WITH ORIGINALITY? SURELY NOT…

On first glance, *Prey* looks nothing more than a slightly prettier version of *Doom 3* with an unusually luminous weapon set. Stunningly rendered enemies – all leathery skin and disfigured features – appear from nowhere and assault the player with no regard for their own safety. However, a second look reveals something different – *Prey* is attempting to redefine the very concept of the videogame space by breaking down traditional boundaries such as gravity and time.

The basis of this 'boundary breaking' is something Human Head is calling Portal Technology. This basically means enemies will appear on screen at random via a circular portal; this rips a hole in the universe that the player currently inhabits and acts as a gateway to a different world. The player passes through these portals to progress though the level. It's tremendously confusing but looks stunning – the progression through parallel universes is seamless.

But the confusion – and invention – doesn't stop there. In *Prey*, walls are more of a suggestion than a barricade. On multiple occasions, Tommy (the game's protagonist) can walk up a vertical wall and onto the ceiling, all the time maintaining an upright position, dragging the game world with him. You need to forget every concept of movement through a three-dimensional space that you've ever experienced in a videogame (or in real life, for that matter) because *Prey* refuses to conform. Players who suffer from disorientation or have a bad sense of direction be warned: Human Head's shooter might just melt your mind.

Prey also has a story to tell but don't expect it to be any less confusing. Players take on the role of a Cherokee garage mechanic living a menial life on a reservation, until everything changes when he and his people are abducted by an alien race. Unsurprisingly, you take it upon yourself to free your kind from the confines of the mothership in which they are imprisoned. However, this mothership is not your everyday giant floating spaceship – this ship is alive, a 'highly organic living environment', and one which will assault you physically and mentally. That's how Human Head is explaining the game's insane mechanics, anyway…

Before you forget, *Prey* still is, at heart, a first-person shooter. The gunplay has a lot in common with *Doom*: more of an out-and-out blaster than a graduate of the *Halo* school of tactical action combat. Weaponry once again differs from the norm, in particular, a peculiar insect 'gun' featuring legs which can be ripped off then thrown as explosives. Every aspect of *Prey* is highly innovative but only a thorough playthrough will tell if the sum of its bizarre parts adds up to a game worth playing. At the moment the combat appears to be rather basic but given the game's penchant for multi-dimensional puzzles, actually having any thought power left in your brain to deal with enemies might be too much to ask.

Prey is an astounding technical achievement and brimming with potential. The real danger for Human Head is the game's confusing nature. It must be made clear to the player at all times what it is they need to be doing and, more importantly, where they need to go. Signposting is crucial in any successful game but in *Prey* it's absolutely essential. It would be a crying shame if a piece of software that has had so much care lavished upon it became too complicated. Expect to have your brain upset some time next year.

"SIGNPOSTING IS CRUCIAL IN A SUCCESSFUL GAME BUT IN PREY IT'S ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL IF YOU'RE TO GET ANYWHERE"

DETAILS

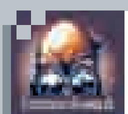
FORMAT: PC, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Human Head Studios
RELEASE: 2006
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

A stunning-looking FPS that makes full use of the *Doom 3* engine, *Prey* subverts the traditional concepts of space and gravity to create something unique.

OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE

Just when it seemed *Prey* couldn't ram any more ideas into its toolbox, along comes Spirit Walking. Tommy has the ability to 'astral project' – essentially sending his spirit out to carry out tasks while he remains still. The spirit can travel though walls that Tommy would find impassable, activate switches, and even dispatch foes using a Spirit Bow. A similar feature was seen in Free Radical's *Second Sight* but *Prey*'s equivalent is much more integral to gameplay and unique in an FPS. The game's focus on the spirit once again reinforces the Cherokee heritage of its protagonist – it's refreshing to have a major videogame that avoids the typical Caucasian action hero.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Human Head Studios, based in Wisconsin, is responsible for the lesser-known Xbox and PC FPS *Dead Man's Hand,* a western-themed shooter. *Prey* is its first major title to make any waves in the industry – it's been in development for nearly a decade, which is reflected in its level of invention.

HISTORY

- **DEAD MAN'S HAND** 2004 [Multi]
- **RUNE** 2000 [Multi]
- **BLAIR WITCH: LEGEND OF COFFIN ROCK** 2000 [PC]

"PREY IS A SERIOUS, DARK STORY BASED ON AUTHENTIC CHEROKEE MYTHOLOGY"
2K GAMES PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SAY A LITTLE PREYER

DOOM 3 + SECOND SIGHT + CONFUSION = PREY

Man, that thing's hideous. But you've got to admit it's kind of stunning at the same time.

Prey uses a lovely black and white filter when dealing with more 'spiritual' moments.

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

POWER PLAY

PGR2 + XBOX 360 x LIVE = PGR3

"PGR3 CREATES THE ULTIMATE ROSTER OF THE HOTTEST SUPERCARS, INTRODUCES THEM TO THE HD ERA, AND DROPS THEM INTO A COMPLETELY NEW GAMING WORLD"

MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

■ Crowds will come to life on the 360 as each person will be an individual character model.

■ New York and Tokyo tracks have been unveiled. Let's hope London and Edinburgh are back.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Formerly a company known as Raising Hell Software, Bizarre Creations came into being in 1995 thanks to a chap known as Martyn Chudley. It has now grown into one of the UK's best development houses, and has produced games for consoles from the Sega Mega Drive all the way through to the Xbox 360.

HISTORY

- **PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2 [Xbox]**
- **PROJECT GOTHAM RACING [Xbox]**
- **METROPOLIS STREET RACER [DC]**



LIFE LOOKS BETTER IN THE FAST LANE

Every new console needs a killer app and a world-beating series of games before anyone will part with the cold, hard cash for the machine itself. The Xbox 360 has innovative applications bursting out of every port, but without any sign of *Halo 3*, many are wondering what will fill the gap in the games department. The obvious answer to that is *Project Gotham Racing 3*, a game so visually and aurally impressive that it serves as a perfect example of what Microsoft means by the term 'next-generation gaming'.

The second instalment of the legendary racing series was almost single-handedly responsible for showing Xbox users the potential of Live, a service that had until then been a stomping ground for jaded *Unreal Tournament* and *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* die-hards. Offering online scoreboards, tournaments, rankings and some silky smooth eight-player racing, *PGR2* saw Xbox Live push through the one million user mark.

If ever Microsoft needed a game to show off the next generation of Live, *PGR3* is it, and because of this it's clear that Bizarre Creations has been coddled, funded and technically supported to the nth degree in the hope that it can come up with a real world-beater. Judging by what this title is promising, coupled with the fact that it already looks more impressive than anything ever seen on any format, it seems Microsoft will be breathing a sigh of relief.

Early screens and one unbelievable, adrenaline-pumping trailer show that this game is truly next-gen. The cityscapes seen so far point to insanely detailed re-creations of New York and Tokyo, with more urban sprawls to be revealed. On top of that, the colour range makes the whole experience virtually photorealistic, and the sounds of the Ferrari engines scream in a way that makes anyone even remotely interested in four-wheelers weak at the knees.

In fact, this is pretty much the only real difference in the single-player part of the game, as Bizarre Creations is sticking with the tried and tested Kudos formula that has served the series well in the past. This means picking up Kudos points for daring overtakes, catching air time, power-sliding corners and generally showing off in the most powerful cars around.

It sounds like team *Forza* has been adding its creative touches to the title too, as *PGR3* will allow the player to buy and personalise their cars from the start. After all, what's the point in creating visuals of this standard for players to drive around in a Ford Escort? Whether this means a more open structure to the single-player game is unclear, but either way expect plenty of extra rewards for career racing via Live.

On the subject of the cars, it seems that Microsoft has once again roped in the big boys, with Ferrari, Porsche, Dodge and even Lamborghini signing up for the 360. The major players of the four-wheeled world clearly don't mind Bizarre Creations messing with their babies, as the realistic damage capabilities demonstrated by *Full Auto* are certain to make a starring appearance in *PGR3*.

The quality of the game so far points to an experience that – in terms of thrills and spills – could well rival the reality of driving fast cars. And at a fraction of the cost…

"IF EVER MICROSOFT NEEDED A GAME TO SHOW OFF THE NEXT GENERATION OF LIVE, PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3 IS IT"

DETAILS

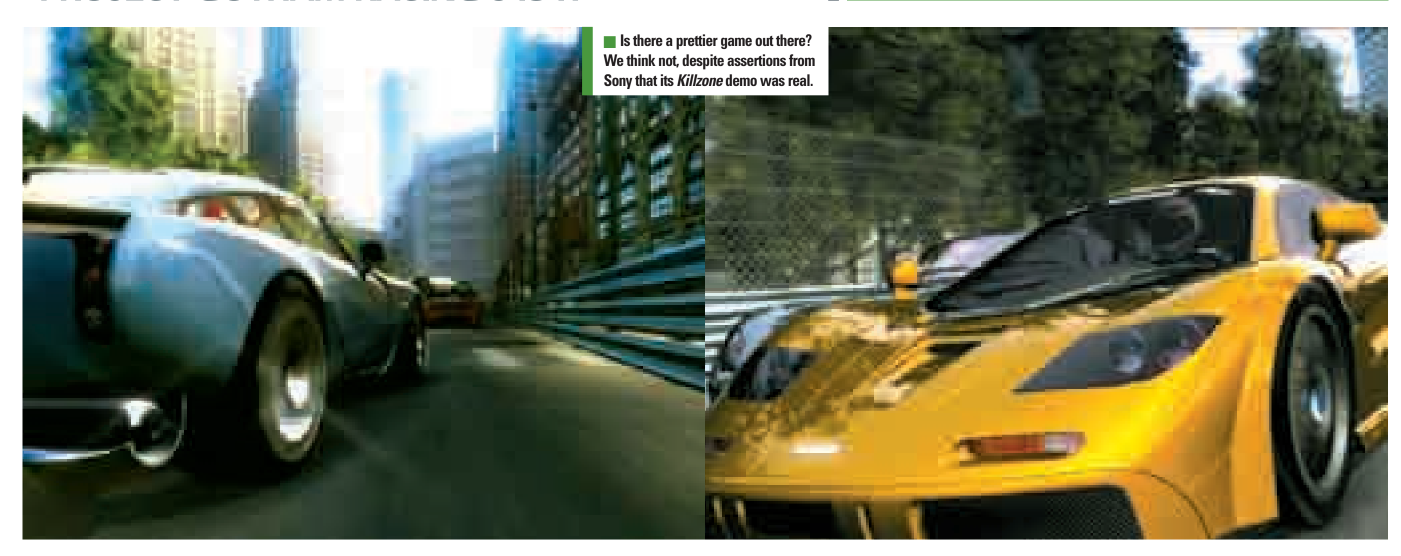
FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Bizarre Creations
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

The next instalment of the finest street racing series ever is launching with Microsoft's next-generation console.

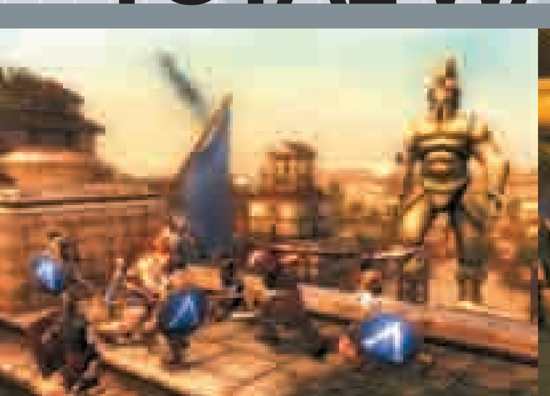
LIVE TV

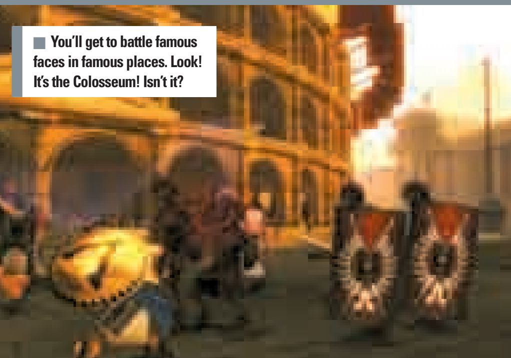
In terms of Live support, *PGR3* offers what it calls GothamTV. This takes advantage of the 360's Spectator mode, which allows gamers to view friends' gaming sessions, chipping in with 'constructive' comments if they like. The service also features a scrolling tickertape to notify you of things like new time records, friends' achievements or just messages from Microsoft. The 360 is also promising organised tournaments, leader-boards and sponsored events that will help to create a real community feel for *PGR3* players. There's been no word on how many players *PGR3* will support per session, but judging by rumours that *Perfect Dark Zero* will be able to accommodate 50, there's no telling how far Bizarre will be able to push the hardware.



Is there a prettier game out there? We think not, despite assertions from Sony that its *Killzone* demo was real.

SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR





You'll get to battle famous faces in famous places. Look! It's the Colosseum! Isn't it?



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Creative Assembly
RELEASE: Sept '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Don a plumed helmet, grab something sharp and hack your way through hundreds of people who don't like the fact you're alive. Yes, it's that simple.

NOTHING LIKE THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR

Branching out into a frenetic action title such as this has been quite a risk for Creative Assembly. The developer is best known for its outstanding efforts in the strategy genre in the shape of the *Total War* series – for it to launch into a whole new genre like this is a little like Nippon Ichi announcing a racing game. With Prinnies. And levelling up. Actually, that needs to happen. We'll get onto it at once. But in the meantime, these pesky armies aren't going to kill themselves, are they?

Spartan keeps getting compared to Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* titles, and while it isn't difficult to see why, there's much more to it than first meets the eye. You'll soon be juggling multiple objectives and fighting for your life at the same time – get too caught up in the bloodshed and you'll last for mere seconds. But it's not all doom and gloom. With the gods on your side you'll be able to unleash a selection of special attacks to smite your foes. The game is also far more graphic than it might appear and if you're used to the relatively family-friendly massacres seen in similar titles, you might be in for a bit of a shock.

Far less shocking is how the game holds together. It looks the part, controls well and there's always loads going on. You'll be put through your paces in familiar historical and mythological settings, meet up with (and often slay) famous names from through the ages, and work up a body count that would make most wars blush.

Accentuating this further is the game's Arena Challenge mode, pitting your hero and a band of allies against wave after wave of enemies of your choosing with nothing more to accomplish than absolute carnage. Yeah, it's simple. Yeah, it's difficult. But by Jupiter's beard, is it ever satisfying.

And as you continue your one-man rampage you'll be able to power up your hero and equip him with all manner of new weapons. Fallen bosses yield goodies like warhammers and twin blades while at certain key points your hero's appearance is improved with new armour and flair, so by the end of the game you'll be controlling the ultimate bad-ass Spartan.

> "KILLING EVERYONE IN HORRIBLE WAYS REALLY SHOULDN'T BE THIS MUCH FUN"

For anyone who likes slaughtering hundreds of people in the name of entertainment, *Total Warrior* is the perfect title to follow *Devil May Cry 3* and *God Of War*. Creative Assembly's first foray into true action gaming should conclusively prove that the firm is far from a one-trick Trojan Horse…

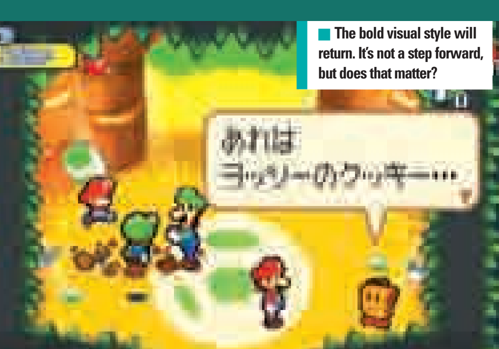


A bit like *Dynasty Warriors*? In terms of numbers, maybe, but there's more to it than that.

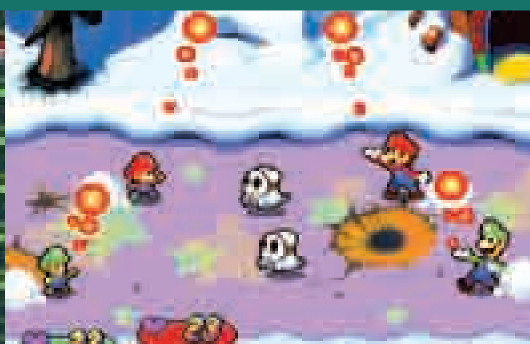
Forget wooden horses – giant mechanical warriors are where it's at.

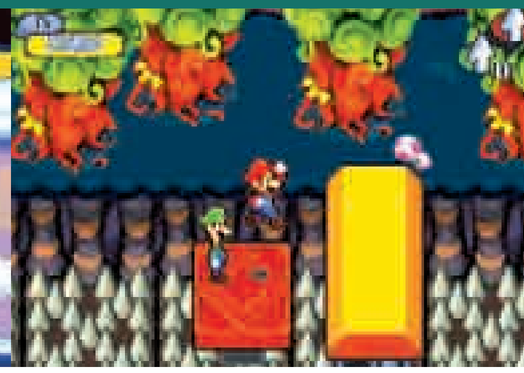

eMag

MARIO & LUIGI 2



The bold visual style will return. It's not a step forward, but does that matter?





IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR FOR THE NINTENDO DS

The life of the DS thus far has seen a few inventive gems such as *Electroplankton* and *Nintendogs* drowning in a sea of spurious touch-screen use, with developers trying to force the DS's innovation to fit their multiformat mentality. *Mario & Luigi 2* is a timely reminder that innovation isn't simply welding the stylus to an inventory screen but using the dual screens too.

This game's tag team element is what made its GBA predecessor, *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, so special, as the brothers had to work together to overcome puzzles and obstacles. It's no surprise to see the duo returning in tandem for this sequel but in another twist Baby Mario and Baby Luigi have been introduced as well.

While Nintendo isn't saying much about the story, which involves yet another escapade to save Princess Peach, the puzzles require the foursome to work together; for example, Mario and Luigi have to throw the younger versions of themselves up to high ledges and suchlike. So far, so typical, but then you come across puzzles such as simultaneously using Baby Mario and older Mario to keep a giant Yoshi quiet – two characters, two different screens, with two different sets of controls… at one time? That's the type of wild genius expected from this sequel and, hopefully, it'll consistently provide this sort of finger-twisting scenario.

"THIS GAME REMINDS US INNOVATION DOESN'T MEAN WELDING THE STYLUS TO AN INVENTORY SCREEN"

If the bit about two different sets of controls seems odd, here's the explanation: Baby Mario and Luigi can be controlled independently, nabbing half of the DS's buttons for their own purposes. The puzzles often see the older and younger siblings getting their own screen, so not only is it a case of deciding which duo to control but it's a question of what screen to watch. It sounds very *Kuri Kuri Mix* right now and marks an unusual development in the Mario RPG series.

The introduction of Baby Mario and Baby Luigi means there isn't much innovation or invention left over to sex up the presentation, which remains very much in the mould of the original *Mario & Luigi*. Similarly, the battle system is still turn based although the two screens merge as one display, allowing for enemies two screens high to take on the rotund plumbers. Other changes are being kept under wraps until the release date draws nearer, but for now the intelligent use of the dual screens and potential of the Mario family quartet should be enough to whet the appetite of any Nintendo fan.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Alphadream
RELEASE: TBA '06 (US: Nov '05)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Babies Mario and Luigi join the fun, with their independent screens and controls demanding your constant attention.



Easily the highlight of what Nintendo has shown, you need to calm giant Yoshi down.


eMag

GUN



You'll eventually befriend the Indians and change your appearance accordingly.

I'M A COWBOY, ON A STEEL HORSE I RIDE

Things not to think about when considering *GUN*: *Young Guns*, Bon Jovi's *Blaze Of Glory*, Will 'Wiki Wa-Wa' Smith, *Bonanza* and Rockstar's *Red Dead Revolver*. These only serve to trivialise the grim reality of the 'wild' west of old, says Activision – although it's hard to take such concerns seriously when the Activision rep is wearing a Stetson and tasselled chaps. But it's a point well made. Despite being an age where men had been desensitised to violence through the bloody Civil War, anything associated with the 'cowboys and indians' mythology is always seen in a stereotypical light; twirling guns, buxom hookers, big-moustachioed bad guys and heroes who ride off into the sunset.

And that's why Neversoft is looking to put this cosy image to rest with *GUN*. An altogether darker and more vicious portrayal of why the west was wild, it's also a tale of tragedy and betrayal, loss and grief, anger and retribution. Many of these themes stem from the lead character, Colton White. An average outback cowboy, the poor man falls foul of a group of invading rebel soldiers during a riverboat ride and ends up witnessing the murder of his father, Ned. Or at least he would do if it wasn't for the fact that Ned isn't his natural father. One dying-breath conversation later and Colton's out in search of truth, justice and, most importantly, revenge.

How this all plays out is what makes Neversoft's game so intriguing. While it would be crass to describe it as 'Grand Theft Auto: Dodge City', that's essentially what *GUN* is – a huge perpetual world that (according to Activision) you're free to explore and where anything can happen around you. As such, you can find yourself in the middle of a gunfight if you enter the wrong saloon at the wrong time, be attacked by Indians if you encroach on their territory, become a wolf snack should you venture into the wilderness alone, and much more besides…

Naturally, though, progress is primarily plot-driven through a series of missions and it's these that open up new areas. For instance, the crossing out of Dodge City won't be built until you've completed some objective-based tasks. Interestingly, the game splits this action between third person and first person, all of which seems fairly easy to control. Although shooting from a third-person view plays similarly to *Red Dead Revolver*, entering the first-person viewpoint can activate special weapon abilities if they're available (such as slow-motion when using dual pistols or a zoomed sight with the sniper rifle).

However, it's the obligatory side missions that expand the world even further; new objectives are unlocked as the story progresses, allowing you to travel off the path and help (or hinder) other people as you see fit. This sounds great in theory, but we have our concerns, especially as Activision's *True Crime* also promised a similar style of freedom and creativity but ended up uninspired and limited. What's more, there's an indication that the game swings wildly between looking suitably authentic and somewhat lacklustre, with the PS2 version that we saw having some ropey character models and flame effects.

These two things alone could be enough to derail any potential *GUN* may have, although potential is the game's strong point right now – we just hope it translates into an exciting and expansive adventure rather than something rather more linear.

> "GUN HAS A LOT OF POTENTIAL – WE JUST HOPE ITS CLAIMS OF EXPANSIVENESS ARE MORE GTA THAN TRUE CRIME"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360, Cube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

More *Deadwood* than *Little House On The Prairie*, Activision's gritty take on the wild west offers free-roaming, mission-based adventuring with a gun-slinging slant.

SHAVE AND A SCALP CUT

Common myth: the act of scalping was originally an Indian tradition. Fact: white settlers started it after the process was developed as a means of confirming the kill (and thus collecting the bounty) of nefarious individuals. Not surprisingly then, one of the main sources of income for you in *GUN* is through the reaping of scalps. Any downed enemy is ripe for the picking, so you can rack up a fair collection during each mission. That said, you have to be aware of your surroundings when actually taking a scalp; other enemies aren't going to wait around while you do the dirty work, so you have to make the call between grabbing your prize and not getting filled with lead.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Neversoft has come a long way in its ten-year history – going from a small team to over 60 people spread across two separate development units. Much of its success has to be attributed to the *Tony Hawk* franchise, of course, but that's certainly not a slight on the ability of those who work at the studio.

HISTORY

- **SPIDER-MAN** 2000 [Multi]
- **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER** 1999 [Multi]
- **APOCALYPSE** 1998 [PSone]

If you're in the wrong place at the wrong time it's easy to get caught up in a shoot-out.

The Gatling gun was invented in 1861 by Dr Richard Gatling. You learn something every day.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GET OFF YOUR HORSE AND DRINK YOUR MILK

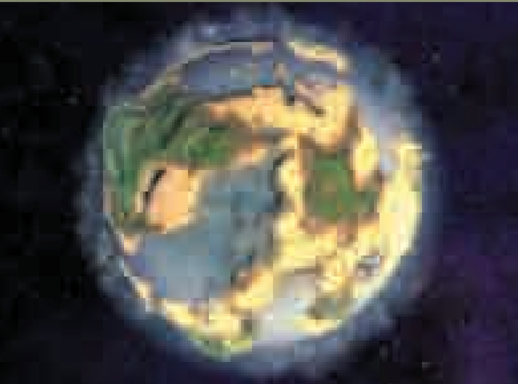
WIKI WIKI WA-WA - SPAGHETTI x DEADWOOD = GUN

"IT WAS AN ERA OF VIOLENCE AND LAWLESSNESS, SO IT MEANS THE GAME ALLOWS YOU TO DO ANYTHING – IT'S A WORLD WHERE ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN"

TIM WOODLEY, MARKETING MANAGER, ACTIVISION

SPORE


Spore is sure to remind you of all those biology lessons that you've been trying to forget.





DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Maxis
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Simulation
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

Take control of life from the very beginning of time and lead it through to the hi-tech space battles of the future in the ultimate sim.

IT COULD BE THE CELL OF THE CENTURY

Simulation games have a reputation for being mildly uninteresting to those not fascinated with the subject matter. This is understandable, as it's fairly difficult to willingly spend large periods of time piloting aeroplanes when you don't give a damn about altimeters and fuel gauges, for instance. Realising this is where the clever people at Maxis came up trumps. With *The Sims* they gave gamers a subject that everyone cares about – life itself. As the fascination with shows like *Big Brother* has demonstrated, there's nothing we like more than observing and shaping the lives of other people; as a result, *The Sims* has served both Maxis and EA very well, but with *Spore* the idea has been expanded beyond belief.

The concept, as with all life sims, is a simple one – you control a life. Actually that's wrong; in *Spore* you take control of life in general. Guiding the progression of a single-celled organism, you have to develop life from the slow crawl from the primordial soup right the way through to the exploration of the universe.

Although it's essentially a sim, there are many other genres making an appearance in *Spore*. The game will begin in a simple *Pac-Man* way, with you drifting your way through ooze picking up the elements needed to multiply, at which point the game will switch to a 3D action title. As time progresses you'll have the opportunity to build cities, construct spacecraft and lead your cell from its simplest state right through to conquering advanced alien races, essentially revisiting elements from many of the developer's previous successes in one massive title.

> "THIS MUST BE THE LARGEST AND MOST INVOLVING GAME EVER CREATED"

This all sounds very promising, but the feature that really excites us is that *Spore* will also automatically upload your game data to other players' computers and download everyone else's to your hard drive. This means you're looking at a game swarming with the created creatures and planets of others, and that therefore boasts the potential for you to truly explore a virtual universe, making this the largest and most involving game ever created.

You don't need us to tell you that this is a hugely ambitious title and if Maxis manages to pull it off then there's a fair chance we could have a classic on our hands. Unfortunately, it looks like we may still have the best part of a year and a half to wait to find out. It should be worth it, though.


Impressive cities can be built as you lead your race from the cradle to the grave.


Sure, it looks basic now, but just you wait 'til you start evolving.


eMag

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND



If BMX meeting *Tony Hawk's* sounds weird, check this out: Sid Vicious on two wheels?

Customise your skater how you like. Mohawk? Ramones bowl cut? It's up to you.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HEY HO, LET'S GO

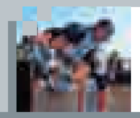
BMX + EIGHTIES PUNK x LA = T.H.A.W.

"NO LEVELS. NO LOAD TIMES. JUST NEVER-ENDING ACTION THAT DOESN'T STOP UNTIL YOU LEAVE THE GAME"

ACTIVISION PRESS RELEASE

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



SKATER PROFILE

From being an entry-level professional at 14 to the most famous skateboarder alive, Tony Hawk has come a long way. Having retired in 1999 at the age of 31, Hawk now acts as a spokesman for the sport, as well as running Birdhouse Projects, one of the world's biggest skateboard companies.

HISTORY

- **TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION 1998**
- **WORLD CUP SKATEBOARDING CHAMP 1998**
- **X-GAMES SUMMER CHAMPION (VERT) 1995**



DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GC, Xbox 360, DS, GBA
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
RELEASE: TBA (US: Nov '05)
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

Tony Hawk leaps off his board and cycles around Los Angeles while listening to Black Flag. He nods his head approvingly at the lack of loading times.

DON'T CRY, DON'T RAISE YOUR EYE, IT'S ONLY AMERICAN WASTELAND

PS2 **After the mixed response to *THUG 2*, which was criticised for wearing its desperation to ride the *Jackass* hype wave on its sleeve, influences have been changed and tweaked.** Gone are the bright colours, the rough video edit style and DIY stunt ethic that punctuated the last entry in the *Tony Hawk's* series. Even Bam Margera has been shown the door.

For *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland*, Neversoft is hitting the rewind button and mining Eighties LA for its punk rock chic. Mohawks, leather jackets and spiked wristbands are now the foundations of *THAW*'s aesthetics. It's a strange mix given that skating and Mohawks typically occupy opposite ends of the punk spectrum but it's a visual style that's working where other changes aren't quite so obvious.

The main selling point? Rather than being broken into different themed levels, the skateboarding now takes place in one expansive, seamless level. The *SSX* series first suggested this was the way forward for extreme sports games but at last it seems someone has listened. The addition of Bert Slides and Natas Spin handstands won't sell this sequel to the veterans who've had their combo tendencies satisfied with manuals, caveman and revert moves. Likewise, the addition of a barbershop to customise your look is neat but merely an in-game adaptation of an option that used to sit in *THUG 2*'s menus. It's the open structure that has the potential to draw new fans while keeping old hands happy. This will be complemented by the familiar Classic mode, so both camps of *Tony Hawk* fans will find something to their tastes.

While that particular move makes sense, the decision to include BMX rides isn't as clear. Following *THUG 2*'s tepid experimentation with various vehicles, this sequel sees the series plant a foot firmly in BMX territory, with the option to play the entire game on two wheels rather than four. It's a bizarre decision, and if *THAW* reeks of LA punk it also has a whiff of a series desperately trying to outmanoeuvre the narrowing confines of its genre.

The only rational explanation for the series skating into two-wheeled turf is that it's picking up where Mat Hoffman and Dave Mirra slid into gaming oblivion. In an age where Solid Snake can battle cartoon monkeys without gamers batting an eyelid, perhaps Tony Hawk swapping four wheels for two isn't quite the shock it first seems, but Neversoft will play it safe and make these new BMX rides a choice rather than an obligation.

Despite the addition of bikes, *THAW* still looks and sounds very much like a *Tony Hawk's* game. But that's precisely why this sequel has struggled to grab attention. This is number seven in the series and the evolution appears to favour the ludicrous (the heavily criticised story challenges are set to play a major part again) over the footloose gameplay. At the moment, the open world and addition of bicycles are papering over the lack of progress elsewhere, helping the series stall for time. But are they enough to stop this becoming *Pro Skater 7*?

> "NEVERSOFT HAS PLAYED SAFE, MAKING THE BMX RIDES AN OPTION NOT AN OBLIGATION"

WIRED FOR SOUND

If the *Tony Hawk's* series' most famous element is its grow-your-own-combo gameplay, its soundtracks run a close second with the marriage between Motörhead's *Ace Of Spades* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* still the defining moment of the series. While a licensed soundtrack isn't in doubt for *THAW*, no bands have been confirmed yet. However, given the Eighties LA punk setting it's not unreasonable to expect the likes of Dead Kennedys, The Ramones and Black Flag. What will be interesting to see is whether Neversoft goes down the *San Andreas* route of a themed soundtrack or continues to pepper its song selection with hip-hop.



We're not entirely convinced by the Eighties LA punk thing, but it looks nice…

LA RUSH



Unlike previous *Rush* games, this one looks to offer realistic backgrounds as well as speed.

LIKE A HEAD RUSH, ONLY BETTER – AND WITH CARS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 21 Oct '05
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Drive like a mentalist, avoid the police and win a load of cars, prize money and the respect of your peers in suitably high-speed fashion.

PS2 **If there's one man who captures everything that's good about being 'urban' and 'street', it's Tim Westwood.** His pseudo-English hip-hop babble never fails to raise a smile ("straight built for beef" and "it's about to go down…" are two house favourites) and we just can't get over how much he sounds like a man reading a script that he doesn't understand. Why are we telling you this? Simple. We're pretty sure that Mr Westwood would say that *LA Rush* "turns your console into a zoo".

LA Rush cribs a little from most recent arcade racers – the short-cuts of *Midnight Club*, the demolition of *Burnout 3* and the modding features of just about every title of the last few months all show up in some form. The open-plan structure also mimics *Need For Speed Underground 2* or *Midnight Club 3*, although Midway's refined Los Angeles cityscape (keeping familiar landmarks while shrinking less interesting areas) is still far bigger than either title. Take into account the masses of destructible scenery, wealth of stunt options and general cruising potential and the size of *Rush* is pretty overwhelming.

But at its core *LA Rush* is a racer and its many different events acknowledge this. Your usual point-to-point races through the city make up much of the action although the underlying story offers several more original possibilities for game modes. Retrieving a stolen car means having to make it home without incurring too much damage from swarms of thugs in SUVs while a variety of ideas like elimination races and stretches with minimum speed limits keep the Story mode interesting.

But between and even during races you'll have to obey the law if you don't want to land a hefty fine – cops cruise the busy LA streets just waiting to bust your punk ass as soon as you step out of line. Cue massive chases down bustling highways and cramped back alleys to reduce your 'wanted' level; speeding under a flatbed or over an empty transporter is a sure-fire way to cause *Blues Brothers*-style pile-ups for the plod.

It might be a bit easier to lose the heat if the roads weren't so busy – highways are teeming with vehicles to weave between, slide past or cross-your-fingers-and-hope-you-fit under. With Jedi reflexes and a little luck there aren't many situations that can't be avoided, even if it does mean careering off the freeway and over rooftops. This is living the dream at its most outrageous and whether you're cruising around looking for something to do or screaming through the city by night in a crunch race against LA's finest, Midway has brought the larger-than-life *Rush* franchise up to date in impressive fashion.

With hordes of racers after your attention, it's hard to get excited about pretty much anything on wheels right now. *Forza* and *GT4* are still keeping us busy while E3 dazzled racing fans with glimpses of *Project Gotham 3* and *Motor Storm*. Midway is nothing if not brave to throw *LA Rush* into the thick of this racing madness. Not to say that *Rush* is a bad game – far from it. We've been pleasantly surprised by *Rush* every step of the way and with the right promotion this could be a massive sleeper hit for Midway. As you'll never hear Mr Westwood say, "It really is quite good, you know."

"BETWEEN AND DURING RACES YOU'LL HAVE TO OBEY THE LAW IF YOU DON'T WANT TO LAND A HEFTY FINE"

OUT, DAMNED MOD

While games like *Juiced* and *Midnight Club* are all about letting the player do whatever they like to their wheels, *LA Rush* takes away all creative control from you. The friendly folk at West Coast Customs will take your baby in (not your real baby – that'd be wrong) and for a couple of thousand dollars put it through the motions, tune the hell out of it, bolt on some unnecessary and/or unsightly extras and let you have it back. Better still is the ensuing cut-scene – the WCC guys will walk you around the decked-out vehicle, pointing out exactly what's been done to it in a manner that Xzibit fans might just recognise. Whether or not we'll get to put recording equipment, widescreen TVs and PS2s in our rides remains to be seen.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Midway has had a real rollercoaster ride these last few years, flitting erratically from the heights of *Psi-Ops* and *NBA Ballers* to absolute nonsense like *Freaky Flyers* and *SpyHunter* via *Mediokre Kombat* in the blink of an eye. Still, its line-up going into 2006 is as gem-encrusted as they come.

HISTORY

MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION 2004 [Multi]
DR MUTO 2003 [Multi]
NBA JAM 1993 [Arcade]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LA-LA LAND

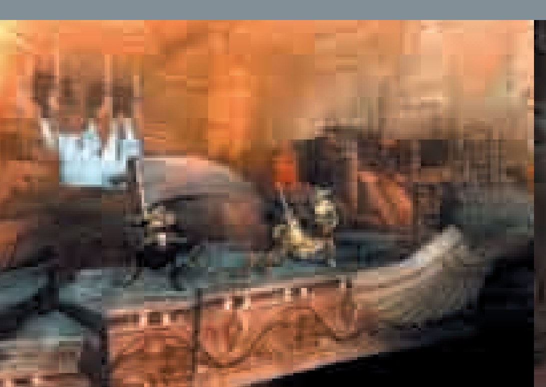
MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION + BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN + STUNTMAN = LA RUSH

Slamming into cars, leaping off skyscrapers – that's still the *Rush* way of doing things.

"RACE ACROSS A FULLY OPEN AND RECREATED LOS ANGELES THROUGH HOLLYWOOD, SANTA MONICA, SOUTH BAY, SOUTH CENTRAL AND DOWNTOWN"
MIDWAY PRESS RELEASE

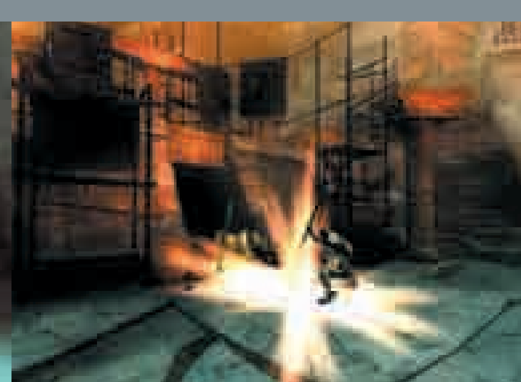
Cops, pigs, fuzz – call them what you like but the police are still the bane of a Rusher's life.

GAUNTLET: SEVEN SORROWS





Despite the new take on the original *Gauntlet*, dungeon-type areas will make an appearance.



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: Midway San Diego
RELEASE: Nov '05
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Think an easy *Baldur's Gate* with a more dynamic camera. *Gauntlet* with numbers, if you will.

SHOOTING THE FOOD SINCE 1985

Valkyrie, Wizard, Dwarf and Warrior. It was 20 years ago when the old gang first got together for some four-player monster annihilation and since then *Gauntlet* has gone through many, mostly cosmetic, changes. *Diablo* was just one game to take the exploration, teamwork and Orc-death template and enhance it with RPG-style number crunching; there are countless other variations on the theme.

Midway, never a company to let a franchise die a natural death, has seen the flaws between its IP and the sterling work of its imitators, and has flown in RPG guru Josh Sawyer to design *Seven Sorrows* as, for the first time with a *Gauntlet* game, a story that works far beyond the dungeon-raiding routine and features characters that are no longer archetypes. Indeed, where there were four there now stand six and they all have stories, backgrounds and motivation.

Taking *Gauntlet* and making it more like modern action RPGs is an idea obvious since, well, 1985. Midway's direction, however, will not be number-intensive or require much in the mode of character micro-management. It's RPG action with a light touch, which you may consider odd. Action RPGs are never that complicated in the first place, and a lot of their charm comes from the very numbers and weapon modification that *Seven Sorrows* promises to keep "user friendly".

This gentle take on a genre of which Midway hasn't been champion for two decades causes most concern. But it also means the game will run faster with less fiddling around with +3 drinking horns or scarves of ultimate distress and more time spent doing what *Gauntlet* has always stood for – multiplayer co-operative slaying.

As well as helping each other out, characters can chain their abilities together to create devastating attacks. And gone are the days when Player 2 trundles ahead and claims all the health potions. There are no health potions. Instead the developer has implemented an original system for health recovery that… okay, you reave their souls, collect their spirits, suck on the life-force of the dead. You know, like you do in *Soul Reaver*, or *Onimusha*.

If this isn't the greatest *Gauntlet* ever then the developer has missed a massive opportunity. The right people are involved and the game is getting the changes it's always screamed for. Easy on the light touch, though. Please.

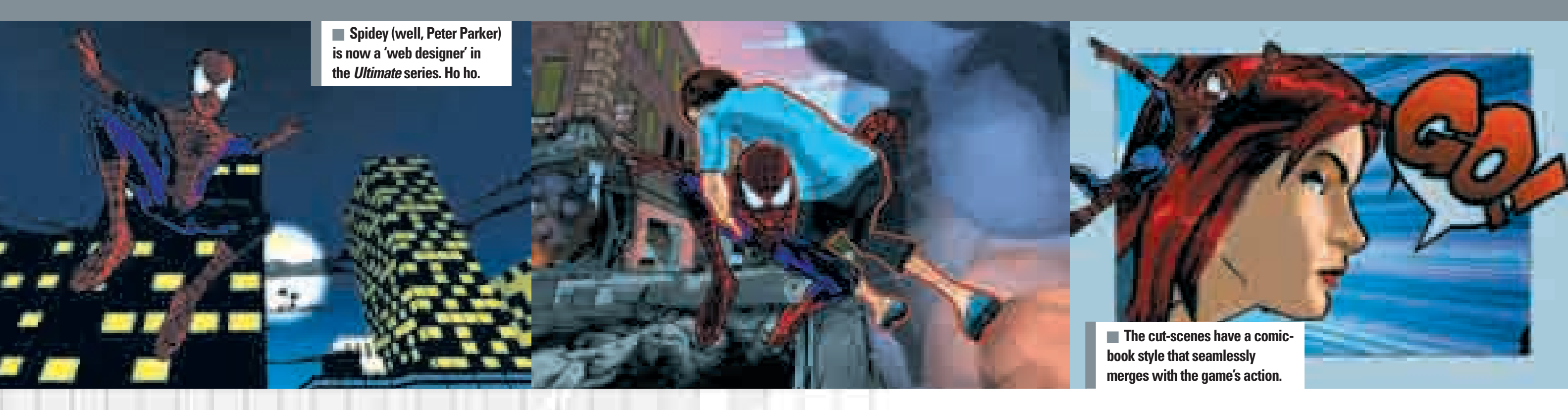


Spells cause the usual visual effects, not unlike a Jean-Michel Jarre show. Go on – do *Oxygene*!

"IF THIS ISN'T THE BEST GAUNTLET EVER THEN THE DEVELOPER HAS MISSED A MASSIVE OPPORTUNITY"


eMag

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN



Spidey (well, Peter Parker) is now a 'web designer' in the *Ultimate* series. Ho ho.

The cut-scenes have a comic-book style that seamlessly merges with the game's action.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, GC, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Treyarch
RELEASE: Sept '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

The spiritual sequel to Treyarch's *Spider-Man 2* movie licence, with a unique art style and an original story. Expect more city-wide web-slinging action, playing as Spidey and arch-nemesis Venom.

DOES WHATEVER AN ULTIMATE SPIDER CAN

PS2 **Treyarch's console re-imagining of the second *Spider-Man* movie was met with a modicum of critical acclaim.** Many hours could be wasted simply scaling Manhattan's tallest buildings or web slinging from point to point, experiencing a rush of adrenaline and freedom with every 'thwip' of web-fluid from Spidey's wrist. Good news then, that Treyarch has decided to maintain this dynamic for its upcoming interpretation of Brian Michael Bendis' *Ultimate Spider-Man* comic series, a revamp of the Spidey story set in modern times.

Activision is touting the game's lovely new art style as "3D Comic Inking Technology™". To us, it's a mixture of cel-shading and standard polygon rendering, but there's no doubting that it looks fantastic. A stark contrast to the dull greys of *Spider-Man 2*, the new artistic direction breathes life and colour into the city, and the characters look fantastic, perfectly mimicking their 2D counterparts.

Aside from the luscious new graphics, *Ultimate Spider-Man*'s other main selling point is the ability to play as Venom, Spider-Man's evil and brutal doppelganger. Controlling Venom will allow the player to enjoy the dark side of Marvel life; without the confines of superherodom, Venom is free to vent his frustrations on whoever might get in his way. Butchering civilians is the order of the day here, and what the evil one may lack in web-slinging fun he more than makes up for with sheer brutality. Venom has the power to hurl cars around as if they were Micro Machines, and the Symbiote that surrounds and controls him (a sort of alien life form thing, for those not in the know) can be used to suck life from innocent bystanders. Nasty.

Spider-Man 2's main downfall was its lack of variety during play; missions rarely altered from a 'locate and neutralise' mechanic, and the 'random' occurrences began to repeat after five minutes of exploration. Treyarch is promising far more variety and depth in *Ultimate Spider-Man*; hopefully the city will feel more like San Andreas than the lifeless 'Streets of LA'.

If it can provide a continually exciting experience then *Ultimate Spider-Man* could live up to its name. With a story penned by Bendis himself along with co-creator Mark Bagley, the game should satiate comic-book fans. Look forward to pulling on that mask again in September.

"ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN'S MIX OF CEL-SHADING AND STANDARD POLYGON RENDERING LOOKS FANTASTIC"



Venom uses his strength to wreak havoc on New York. The ASBO's in the post.


eMag





BALDY'S BACK, AND THIS TIME HE WANTS YOUR BLOOD

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Denmark
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: IO Interactive
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ The fourth game in the best-selling *Hitman* series expands upon everything that was successful in the previous games, with emphatic effect.

HISTORY

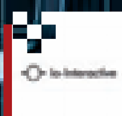
■ IO interactive is intent on making Agent 47 a household name. With a *Hitman* movie in the pipeline, things are looking up for the developer.

PS2 **Agent 47 is becoming an icon. His unmistakable bald head, the barcode tattoo on his neck, his immaculate suit and symbolic blood-red tie, his seemingly innocent briefcase…** The dapper assassin has risen above the mire of identikit videogame heroes and established himself as a multi-layered anti-hero, one strong enough to carry a franchise.

His fourth foray into the debauched grime of the criminal underworld – *Hitman: Blood Money* – has its sights set on world domination. This is IO Interactive's labour of love, the game it's always wanted to create. And it shows. "This was actually designed before *Contracts* [the third *Hitman* game]," says JP Kurup, lead animator on *Blood Money*. "This is the game we really wanted to make after *Hitman 2*. *Blood Money* has been in development for over three years, and is set to provide the most well-rounded and complete *Hitman* experience yet."

This long development period has paid off, with certain changes to the gameplay obvious from the off. For instance, a problem people have had with previous *Hitman* games is the unfairness of its stealth parameters. Even when dressed in full 'guard' regalia, carrying the right gun and acting in a manner entirely befitting the surroundings, you never quite knew if that bloke casually strolling up to you was going to suss you out. Too many Silent Assassin runs were spoiled by a seemingly superfluous chef or flat cap-wearing groundsman realising that their mate Harry has suddenly got a lot balder. This is, of course, realistic, but in the videogame space such ambiguity can lead to ▷

"THE TITULAR HITMAN HAS RISEN ABOVE THE MIRE OF IDENTIKIT VIDEOGAME HEROES AND ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS A MULTI-LAYERED ANTI-HERO WHO CAN CARRY A FRANCHISE"



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ IO interactive, Denmark's premier developer, has now been bought by Eidos. It has had much success with the *Hitman* franchise, and also released *Freedom Fighters* to critical acclaim in 2003. Its focus remains with Agent 47 and furthering the popularity of the series.

HISTORY

- HITMAN: CONTRACTS 2004 [Multi]
- FREEDOM FIGHTERS 2003 [Multi]
- HITMAN 2 2002 [Multi]

■ The glitz of Las Vegas offers the perfect cover for your nefarious crimes.

■ The attention to detail in *Blood Money* goes way beyond the previous games.

"THE ULTIMATE WAY TO CARRY OUT A HIT IS TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE YOU WERE NEVER THERE"

frustration. Kurup is quick to explain how this has been combated in *Blood Money*: "The player will notice while playing that we have this zone security system, so a guy you see in the first zone will not appear in the last zone." This immediately allows some leeway in approaching a level. A mistake made early on doesn't necessarily mean it's time for a restart.

However, when Agent 47 inevitably does get rumbled, he can be far more proactive than in the past. "You might have the chance to disarm [an enemy], and take them out in a stealthy way," Kurup says, as 47 swiftly disarms a guard before spraying him and his two comrades with bullets. "By hiding your gun behind your back you can go around public places with your gun out, to avoid situations [as in previous titles] where someone would see your gun from 200 metres away and be like, 'Hey he's got a gun', which wouldn't happen in real life." Seeing Agent 47 subtly tuck his gun behind his back, like a child who's just been caught raiding the biscuit tin, is so clever that it's incredible no-one has thought of it before.

All the tweaks and additions to the core gameplay are very well implemented, but IO has another ace up its sleeve. For *Blood Money* it has created a 'notoriety' system, which is essentially a percentage that equates to how well known 47 is around the globe. This statistic follows Agent 47 from mission to mission, giving the game an organic and realistic edge. It changes depending on how you conduct business during a level; for example, sneaking around, and carrying out the hit like a veritable Sam Fisher will keep your notoriety level very low. However, blast through a level leaving a trail of bodies in your wake and there are going to be witnesses everywhere.

Rasmus Hoejengaard, the game's director, explains the consequences of an 'unstealthy' approach. "If your notoriety goes up to 100 per cent you will have to butcher your way through a level because there is a great chance of everybody recognising you at once and just going to get the guards." So, is stealth the only way to success? Not necessarily. "The way, of course, to fix that is that there are ways to lower your notoriety with your money," explains Hoejengaard – it's possible to bribe key figures in a mission, or even create a whole new identity for yourself.

"You can buy a new identity for a very high cost. If you wanted to buy no weapon upgrades, for example, you could max out your notoriety, then buy this new identity."

This is where the 'blood money' moniker becomes self-explanatory, then. And the way you get your hands on this cold, hard cash will be far more subtle than in previous titles. "*Hitman 2* had some 30 ratings [at the end of the mission] you could get, starting from Mass Murderer up to Silent Assassin," explains Hoejengaard. "In *Blood Money* there are 128." Your ranking at the end of the level determines your payment. "Silent Assassin is going to get you a huge pay packet. A less stealthy approach will cause a subtraction to your pay, and in between you'll just get the basic pay, period."

Of the two levels we were shown, the Paris opera mission played host to a demonstration of another inspired feature. The magic word here is 'accident'. The ultimate way to carry out a hit is to make it seem like you were never there. In Paris,

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Replacing the statistical breakdown at the end of a mission in *Contracts* is an ingenious newspaper system. Both factual and dynamic it changes according to Agent 47's actions on the level. The reports will detail the events of the mission, how many people died, where things happened and so on. Cleverly, surrounding articles will give further depth to the game's story, so anyone willing to study these front pages will gain a fuller experience. The ultimate newspaper report will read simply as an obituary for the person who died, with no mention of a bald, crazed lunatic. The more havoc caused in a level, the more information will be revealed about ol' 47, complete with a photofit picture that becomes more accurate as your notoriety increases. These reports are the glue that bind *Blood Money*'s universe. It's all rather clever, really.

VIOLENT ASSASSIN

BLOOD MONEY HAS SOME FANCY NEW FEATURES TO MAKE AN ASSASSIN'S LIFE A LITTLE EASIER

SPLIT SCREEN

■ Key happenings in a level are now shown via a rather delicious picture-in-picture boxout. Should your target be on the move, or your ingeniously murderous plan just about to come to fruition, a little box will appear in the top corner of the screen, displaying full video of what's going on. Quite who's supplying Agent 47 with this useful (and entertaining) third eye is unknown, but who's going to complain if it helps complete a perfect hit?

BOXING CLEVER

■ In *Contracts*, how many times was a silent assassination ruined by a random civilian stumbling upon an embarrassed-looking bald man dragging a limp, lifeless body up some stairs? Too many. IO has scattered many more hiding places and convenient boxes around so you can avoid any awkward questions from by-standers. Hopefully, the days of explaining exactly why there's a dead naked man on your arm are over.



■ Running from the scene of a crime? That's exactly what'll get you spotted, son.



47's target is an actor . During rehearsals the actor is 'sentenced to death' and shot with a blank – the pivotal scene of the show. Agent 47, using his cunning, guile and a silenced pistol, sneaks into the backstage area and swiftly replaces the blank pistol with a real one. It doesn't take a genius to work out what happens next. Cue 47 sneaking out of the opera house unseen amid hysteria and panic, and a verdict of accidental death. That'll be a rather large pay packet, thank you very much.

As impressive as this demonstration was, the fact that our demonstrator knew every nook and cranny of the vast level aided his super-smooth approach. A new player will struggle to even get near this level of stealth and satisfaction. *Blood Money* must be careful to avoid the pitfalls of the previous titles, instead providing ample (yet subtle) signposting toward the multiple hit options. Having to resort to a bungled attempt at murder with a pair of Uzis just because the other options are too well hidden will be frustrating and tedious. Despite the improvements in gunplay and out-and-out combat, there's no doubt that the satisfaction and soul of the *Hitman*

"THIS IS THE GAME WE REALLY WANTED TO DO AFTER HITMAN 2"
JP KURUP, LEAD ANIMATOR, IO INTERACTIVE

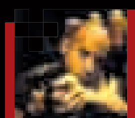
series is the perfectly executed hit. This must be presented as a dangling carrot rather than buried treasure – a tantalisingly difficult but accessible path to glory.

So far, however, *Hitman: Blood Money* is ticking all the boxes. Bursting at the seams with innovation? Oh yes. Intelligent AI? Tick – a gun dropped in the middle of a busy hallway will not just be ignored; people will see it, and deal with it accordingly, whether they pick it up for themselves or call an official to sort it out. Stunning graphics? The re-creation of Las Vegas is marvellous, the brooding sky scorched with neon and illuminated by fireworks. Controls? Tick. Story? Tick. You get the picture. *Blood Money* is looking like the pinnacle of an already top-drawer series, and a serious contender come spring next year.

MORALITY TALE

Agent 47 is a complicated individual. It's hard enough for him dealing with the fact that he's a clone, let alone his inner turmoil concerning the very morality of his existence. This is why IO has injected a healthy dose of conscience into *Blood Money*. Game director Rasmus Hoejengaard explains. "The player is punished for doing stuff he isn't supposed to do, economically." An enforced morality, no? "Getting paid for performing hits – that's sort of an immoral thing, but at least you only get paid for taking out the bad guys, and they are really bad guys. Anything that happens outside of that, you'll be punished for." No wonder 47's so confused. Still, it's interesting and commendable that IO is at least presenting killing people as a moral issue, something so often ignored in the world of videogames.

Melee weapons can be hard to use, but make less mess and noise than a gun.

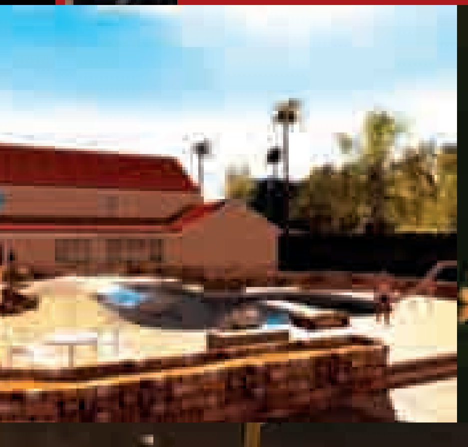


BALDNESS PROFILE

The follically challenged still have plenty to offer in the videogame world. Unlike the real world, videogames allow those males who are suffering from receding hairlines to take out their frustrations in myriad ways, be it on the football pitch (Zinedine Zidane), the battlefield or a bizarre fantasy island.

HISTORY

- CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK 2004 [Xbox]
- PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4 2004 [Multi]
- TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY 1989 [Multi]



IO has been sure to include multiple paths through levels once again.

"HE'S NOT REALLY A GOOD GUY, HE'S NOT REALLY THAT BAD – HE HAS ALL THESE INTERNAL CONFLICTS"

RASMUS HOEJENGAARD, GAME DIRECTOR, IO INTERACTIVE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MONEY FOR NOTHING



HITMAN 2

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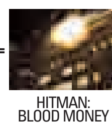
THE BOURNE IDENTITY

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ACCIDENTS

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HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

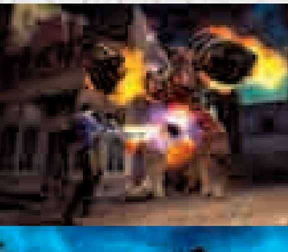
SHOWCASE

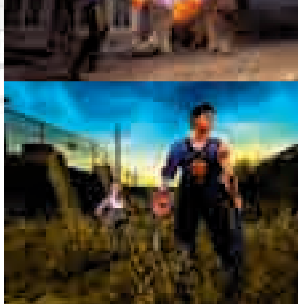
MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

EVIL DEAD REGENERATION

"GIMME SOME SUGAR, BABY"

Format: PS2, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Cranky Pants Games
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1





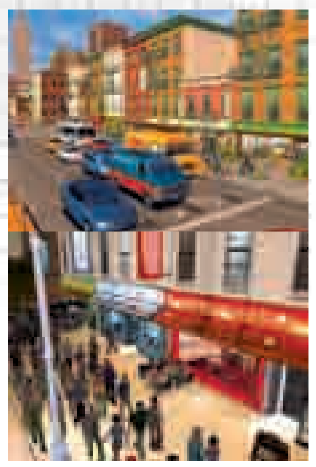
Much like the Deadites themselves, the *Evil Dead* licence just won't die – good for the movie side of things, bad for the games that have so far been pretty mediocre. Even so, THQ is trying again with the release of *Evil Dead Regeneration*, a game that supposedly follows on from the second movie in the trilogy and sees Ash fighting for his life (again) against an evil scientist determined to unlock the secrets of the *Necronomicon*. Despite focusing heavily on the action though, the hook of *Regeneration* is Ash's little helper – a three-foot Deadite that he can use as anything from a torch to a bowling ball in order to overcome any obstacle. Another gimmick for an already gimmick-heavy series? It could work… perhaps.

RELEASE DATE: SEPT '05

TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK

WHO NEEDS DONALD TRUMP?

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Deep Red
Genre: RTS
Players: 1



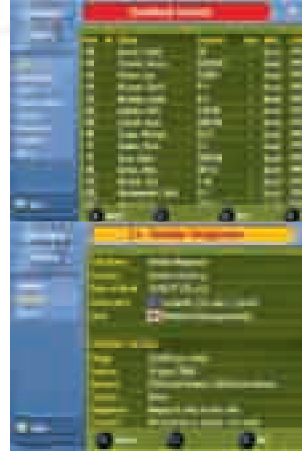
Considering that most *Sim City*-style real-time strategy games offer you a blank fictional canvas on which to build your masterpiece, it seems awfully brave of Deep Red to choose an accurate re-creation of the Big Apple as the topic of its latest effort. That said, you do get to start from the ground up and mould the city as you would like – starting off small in Greenwich Village and then moving through the districts to create the city of your dreams, you can do pretty much what you like within the framework of Manhattan. The whole island is your playground but it's to Deep Red's credit that it has managed to create such a detailed version of the area; hopefully, the rest of the game will offer just as much depth.

RELEASE DATE: NOV '05

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

BIG MANAGEMENT, SMALL HANDHELD

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: UK
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sports Interactive
Genre: Simulation
Players: 1



It sounds like the most unlikely release ever, but the decision to bring the *Football Manager* licence to the PSP could very well be the break that Sports Interactive needs to get into the mainstream market. Obviously, *FM*'s status as the best game of its kind helps but, surprisingly, virtually nothing has been cut out to move it onto Sony's handheld – every stat, tactic and other detail has been squeezed onto the UMD to ensure that the portable *Manager* experience is just as accurate as the PC one. Considering that the PSP will appeal to the very audience that covets Sports Interactive's work, we can't see this doing anything but exceedingly well; SI hasn't dropped the ball yet, and we can't see it happening this time either.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '05

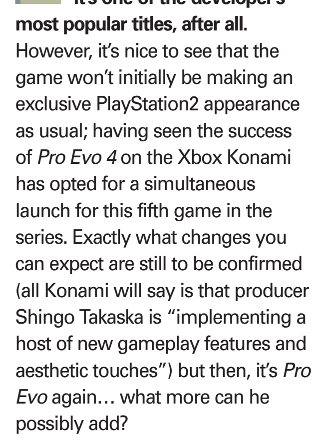
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5

ANOTHER CORNER KICK FOR KONAMI

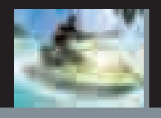
Format: PS2, Xbox, PC
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4 (Online TBA)



It's not much of a surprise to hear that Konami already has yet another iteration of its respected *Pro Evolution Soccer* series in the works – it's one of the developer's most popular titles, after all. However, it's nice to see that the game won't initially be making an exclusive PlayStation2 appearance as usual; having seen the success of *Pro Evo 4* on the Xbox Konami has opted for a simultaneous launch for this fifth game in the series. Exactly what changes you can expect are still to be confirmed (all Konami will say is that producer Shingo Takaska is "implementing a host of new gameplay features and aesthetic touches") but then, it's *Pro Evo* again… what more can he possibly add?

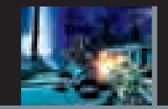


RELEASE DATE: Q4 '05



CANNED – FarCry Instincts (PlayStation2)

■ We hate to say we told you so, but clearly Ubisoft's problems with squeezing *FarCry* onto the humble PS2 have proved too much – the game is now an Xbox exclusive until further notice.



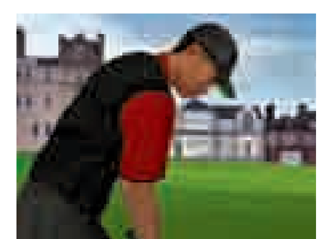
DELAYED – TimeShift (Multi)

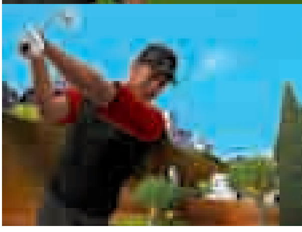
■ Atari's time-manipulating FPS is looking fairly impressive right now, so we're slightly disappointed to hear that it's being moved back from its original October/November release until some time early in 2006.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006

ALL WOODS, VERY FEW TREES

Format: PS2, Xbox, X360, GC, PC, PSP
Origin: US
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Redwood Shores
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



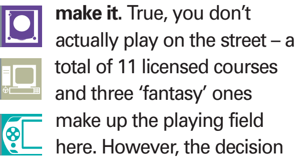






While actually making the change would no doubt rob it of the PGA licence, this year's version of *Tiger Woods* is as close to being 'street' as EA can possibly make it. True, you don't actually play on the street – a total of 11 licensed courses and three 'fantasy' ones make up the playing field here. However, the decision to increase the game's focus on acquiring licensed equipment and clothing, the ability to choose a voice for your player – essential for trash talking, apparently – and the addition of a Gamebreaker that can double your drive distance or even sink near-impossible putts indicates a shift for the series. And yes, we were surprised too.

RELEASE DATE: Q4 '05



ASTERIX AND OBELIX XXL 2

ATARI'S GOT SOME GAUL…

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: US
Publisher: Atari
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1





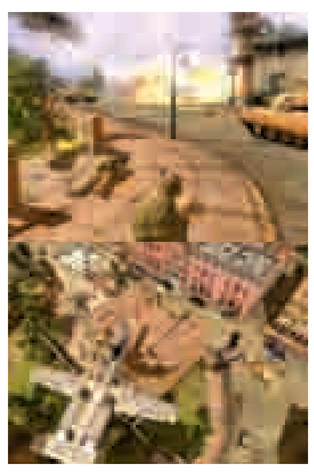
We're fully aware that as a magazine aimed at the mature gamer, an Asterix game isn't something you'd expect to see here. But we couldn't resist – Atari seems so set on ridiculing as many of the game industry's most familiar names and faces, it seems like something our readers would appreciate. The game seems fairly rudimentary (although past Asterix games have actually been quite playable), but the line-up is what made us laugh; parodying the likes of *Mario*, *Pac-Man* and *Tetris* as well as having lead characters such as Larry Craft and Sam Shieffer (ho, and indeed, ho), Atari could earn as much scorn from fellow developers as it will laughs from gamers. Here's hoping everyone sees it as the jest it's clearly meant to be.

RELEASE DATE: OCT '05

GHOST WARS

SPOOKY COSTUMES NOT INCLUDED

Format: PC
Origin: Hungary
Publisher: Hip Interactive
Developer: Digital Reality
Genre: RTS
Players: 1



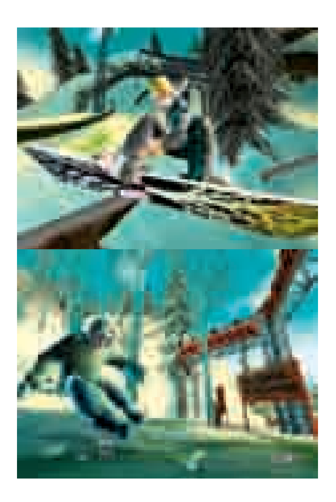
"Possibly the most uniquely realistic RTS experience in the making" – a bold boast from Hip considering just how packed the RTS genre has become on the PC in recent years. But then *Ghost Wars*' decision to focus its action on a modern-day, real-life government military force as opposed to, say, historical battles or space colonisation at least lends some weight to this claim. The ability for the player to go as far out or as close into the fighting as they need allows for some particularly detailed and action-packed scenes, although the key factor as to how accessible that action actually is remains unclear until Hip decides to release some code – something that will supposedly be happening in the coming months.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '06

SSX ON TOUR

A REAL TOUR DE FORCE

Format: PS2, Xbox, Cube, PSP
Origin: Canada
Publisher: EA Sports BIG
Developer: EA Canada
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2







***SSX 3* might have been a step forward for EA's snowboarding series (despite *Tricky* still being the highlight), but it wasn't perfect by a long shot.** In short, it was too open, to the point where you'd end up not knowing where the course limits were, so that's something that the developer is looking to fix in this fourth iteration. Twelve new courses spread over four areas of the new peak (loosely based upon Mount Whistler) await eager boarders, while the revised Monster tricks, unlike their Uber predecessors, actually require skill to pull off. The only big disappointment is that while skis have been offered as an alternative to boards, the difference is nominal. Hardly seems worth it to us.

RELEASE DATE : Q4 '05



1PLAYER
29354
VITAL
TOP
MAGIC17
L8
2
3
2



Prison slang's changed a lot since we were there **Magic Sword – Arcade [Capcom] 1990**

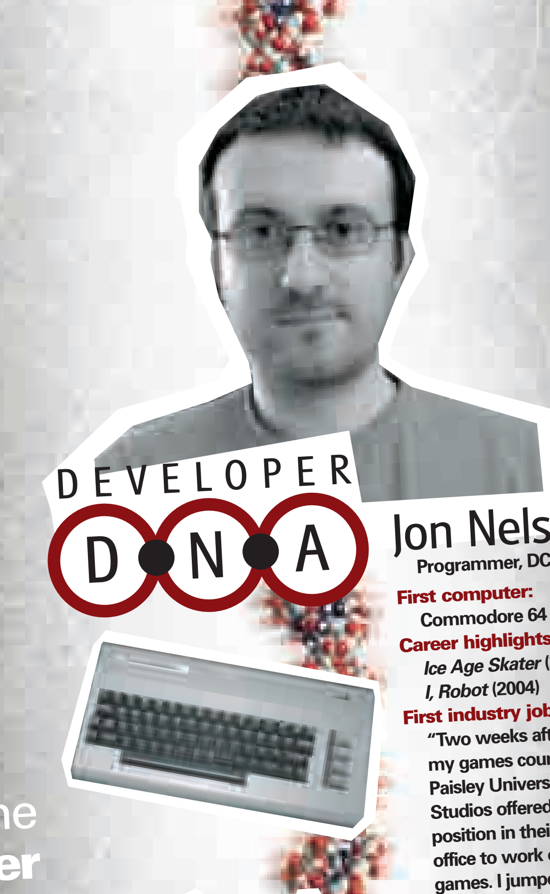

BRIGHT YOUNG

The age of the **celebrity developer** seems to **have passed**, so are there any **young bucks out there** who can become the **new breed of industry gurus?** games™ investigates...

Gaming is no longer the preserve of young men. The figureheads whose games have defined videogaming are, to be frank, getting on a bit. The celebrity developers who brought us ground-breaking games like *Populous*, *Sim City* and *Doom* are creeping towards pensionable age; feted British gurus like Peter Molyneux and David Braben may retain their iconic status but the wrinkles are starting to show. Yet while the jet-set of British game development have become elder statesmen there is little sign of a new generation coming through to replace them. Indeed, it seems as if the celeb developers of yesteryear remain unchallenged by young upstarts. So where are the young guns who should be challenging the star developers of the Eighties and Nineties?

Pete Marshall, senior software engineer at development tools developer SN Systems, believes he knows why there are no gaming 'personalities'. "With so many people behind a game, it's now less about individuals and more about the team," he says. In fact, the growth in the number of staff needed on a development team has been one of the biggest changes in the industry during the past decade. While Molyneux and other celeb developers made their name in the days when a team with more than 10 developers was rare, head counts of as many as 100 are now increasingly common.

But, adds Marshall, this doesn't mean talent goes unnoticed. "Talented people do get ▷



Jon Nelson

Programmer, DC Studios

First computer:
Commodore 64

Career highlights:
Ice Age Skater (2005), *I, Robot* (2004)

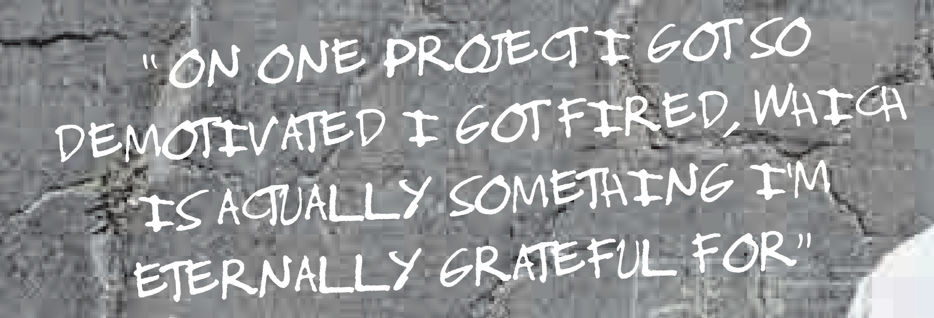
First industry job:
"Two weeks after leaving my games course at Paisley University, DC Studios offered me a position in their Glasgow office to work on mobile games. I jumped at the chance and I'm still there a year on."

Inspirations:
"I have the utmost respect for Nintendo and what they have achieved over the years in the industry. They come across as being genuinely in it for the games. They produce fun and playable games that appeal to everyone, and of course Miyamoto is a legend whom a lot of people look up to."

How different are the reality and perception of working in games?
"The perception is that you sit and play games all day and have loads of fun. But it's really hard work, the hours are long when projects are in the final phase and it can be quite stressful. However, you can't beat the thrill of it when a game is finally out the door."

What do you enjoy about programming?
"I enjoy the challenge of coding. It's like a puzzle, putting all these pieces together that initially don't do anything spectacular on their own but when pieced together produce something that can be played. That's the cool part."





recognition mainly from peers within the industry and most seem happy with that," he says. So does this mean the mid-Nineties hopes of superstar game developers are dead in the water? On the contrary – an emerging band of British developers are promising to be an antidote to the increasingly faceless nature of game development.

Break free

One stand-out studio is Introversion Software, the indie developer that's ripped up the rulebook in a bid to break free from the commercialism of big-budget gaming. Before helping to set up Introversion, Chris Delay had created games for high-profile developers, but his heart wasn't in it. "In all honesty I think I had stupidly high hopes for my time in the games industry," he says. "The issue that took me most by surprise was how much of a business it is. It sounds obvious now but the key decisions about which games will be made and which will be scrapped are all based on which will bring in the most money quickly."

Eventually the business emphasis of the industry proved too much. "I ended up stuck on one of those money-spinning games and it was probably the least enjoyable time of my life," says Delay. "By the end of a year on that project I was so demotivated that I got fired, which is something I'm eternally grateful for."

Spurred on by his forced exit, Delay set up Introversion Software and began to make the kind of games he always hoped to – which have turned out to be some of the most unusual titles to emerge from a UK developer for years. Introversion's debut, *Uplink*, a geeky hacking sim, won a cult following as has this year's *Darwinia*, an innovative marriage of real-time strategy and retro-style action.

Delay, who is the firm's lead designer, says the low cost of running Introversion has given the team the freedom to explore his ideas. "Money doesn't come first," he states. "We are a small team with very low overheads – we have no offices, so our costs are just our time and some laptops. We really don't need money to keep going and we own our entire company as there's no outside investment of any kind, so we can spend our time developing whatever projects we want. It's complete creative freedom and that's pretty unique I think."

But while Introversion has dropped out of the industry to get the creative freedom it wants, commercial pressures can inspire innovation. This was the case for Relentless Software, according to David Amor, the Brighton-based company's creative director. The studio was born when Computer Artworks, which developed *The Thing*, shut its doors.

"Computer Artworks hit the wall and took us down with it. We were halfway through developing *DJ: Decks & FX* for Sony at the time," recalls Amor. "So when it hit the wall we said to Sony 'we still want to do the game' and they suggested we formed a company to continue it. There was no master plan and I think it's the way lots of game companies form. We set up the company in an afternoon."

Having set itself up, Relentless needed to work out what kind of games it would make. "We decided that if we tried to go up against the *Grand Theft Autos* and *Gran Turismos* we'd end up an also-ran," says Amor. "We ended up looking towards games like EyeToy and *Singstar*, which are well-implemented, popular and fun. In addition, you can do these lifestyle or social games well with a team of around 30."

DJ: Decks & FX was a hit and Relentless is now working on *Buzz*, a quiz title using



buzzers as controllers. Amor says while the kind of games Relentless does are easier to develop, they involve more creativity than many big-budget titles. "On one hand they are a lot simpler – you play half an hour [and] you've seen most of what the game has to offer, unlike a *Final Fantasy*-type game," he admits. "But if you're making a third-person role-playing game 90 per cent is just reinventing what's already been done; it's only the last 10 per cent where you try and make it different – it's more painting by numbers, something we have set out not to do."

Indeed, Amor sounds fed up with the amount of copycat games hogging store shelves. "I like any developer who is able to create a polished game that looks to be the best," he says. "I don't have any time for 'me-too' products. A *Gran Turismo* clone will not benefit anyone. Those out there doing 'me-too' products will eventually find that the publishers and the public alike will become less interested. Quick, dirty jobs – and I've worked on a few – don't work in the long-term."

Utimately, he says, developers need to bear in mind the players who will buy the games. "You really have to ask yourself if the person who buys your game will have a good time or end up feeling cheated."

Make it easy

The time and money involved in developing new games have in many ways stripped developers of the creative freedom enjoyed by the likes of Peter Molyneux and *The Sims* ▷

DEVELOPER DNA

Nathan McCree

Musician, McCree Music

First computer:
ZX81

Career highlights:
Tomb Raider (1996), *Battle Engine Aquila* (2002)

First industry job:
Programmer for Core Design

Inspirations:
"Musically I'm open to pretty much everything, although when I was younger I used to be really into heavy metal bands like Def Leppard, Yes and Boston. *Elite* was the biggest inspiration in terms of games."

How do approach your work?
"I try to take a different approach to making music each time because if you follow a tried and tested method then you end up writing the same kind of music. For example, if I started the last piece of music I wrote with a lyric, the next piece might start with a drum sequence."

What would be your three desert island games?
"*Mario Kart* on the SNES. *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* – it's the closest to an interactive movie than anything there has been so far. Finally, *Elite* on the BBC Micro – there's been nothing close to it."

"PEOPLE DOING 'ME TOO' PRODUCTS WILL EVENTUALLY FIND THAT PUBLISHERS AND THE PUBLIC ALIKE WILL BECOME LESS INTERESTED"

creator Will Wright. But while commercial pressures often snuff out creativity, the increasing power of development tools could be a boon. Potentially, these tools, also known as middleware, could free today's developers from having to put together the technological basics, letting them concentrate of the content of the game.

Pete Marshall, who develops these tools, believes his work can reduce the time, and money, spent making games. He began his career making games but feels his programming talents are better suited to his current job. "My interest and skills are very much geared to the technology and hardware – that's why I got out of developing games and moved to tools development," he says. "My previous games experience has helped me to understand the needs of today's game developers when developing our tools. Having a good idea of how developers approach their work is essential."

Jon Nelson, a programmer at DC Studios, agrees that middleware coupled with the extra power of the next generation of consoles could pave the way for the industry to revive its more creative roots.

"I think the best thing about the power of the new consoles [is that] developers have the possibility of creating some amazingly immersive game experiences – they can literally let their imaginations run riot," he says. "Of course, the difficulty with this is that the amount of resources and time that will go into creating these games is going to increase, so you'll see less of these games around initially."

But, he adds, middleware could counteract the time and money pressures. "Developers utilising middleware can get straight into creating the content rather than putting the effort into creating the 3D engine, so I think it won't be as bad in the long run."

Young blood

Another innovation that the next generation of consoles may offer is interactive music, an approach UK game musician Nathan McCree is keen to see adopted. McCree, who was the man behind the music in the first three *Tomb Raider* games, believes interactive music is an under-exploited feature in games.

"I first came across interactive music in an old Amiga game called *Hostages*," he says. "In that game when you ducked into a doorway to hide from the searchlights the music went quiet, but when you started moving it busied up again. I thought that was brilliant."

McCree now believes interactive music's time has come. "It hasn't been used to the extent it could. Maybe the genre for it hasn't yet emerged although I think it is getting nearer with your *Grand Theft Autos* and the like since these games involve lots of different things and that's the sort of genre where interactive music would really fit. Interactive music follows the player's states of emotion and to do it you have to do lots of different pieces of music and replicate them in different moods – for example, a high-action version and low-action version of a piece of music that the game can flip between depending on whether the gameplay is stealth- or action-based at that point."

But while McCree is now a successful audio specialist he began his games career as a fresh-faced programmer at Core Design. "I had been writing music for most of my life but I did a computer science degree at university and ended up being a programmer for Core Design," he says. "One of my first jobs was to write a music sequencer for a game. I finished it early and asked if I could write some of the music and it all changed from that."

Indeed many developers highlighted in this feature have seen significant shifts in the direction of their careers. Relentless' Amor began as a 17-year-old office clerk for publisher Mindscape before getting involved in development work.

Another example is Jon Eckersley, a 25-year-old artist at Lionhead Studios. Like



McCree he studied computer science at university but got to try his hand at game art by making mods for *Quake III*. By the end of university he decided that art rather than coding was what he wanted to do and so managed to shift sideways after stints at Blitz Games and Rare. In January this year he arrived at Lionhead helping with the artwork for *Black & White II*.

Eckersley says his time at Blitz and Rare not only gave him his first experiences of professional game development but also helped him hone his artistic style. "At Rare I worked closely with Johnny Christianson, the lead character artist for *Star Fox: Dinosaur Planet*," he says. "I studied a lot of his character designs and looking back I think it helped me define a style that is halfway between cartoon and realism, which is great for *Black & White II*."

In many ways Eckersley is in a privileged position. Lionhead, rather like Rare, is a big studio that can afford to experiment and try out new, innovative games. Most development studios are under very real pressure to make ends meet and this inevitably inhibits more off-the-wall titles. Introspection has shown there is an alternative to the mainstream industry but few will be able to realistically follow in its footsteps. So for now commercial pressure suggests the age of the star developer may have been and gone, but perhaps the growth of middleware and the rise of the next-gen consoles will allow the creative gurus to come to the fore once again.

DEVELOPER DNA

Jon Eckersley
Artist, Lionhead Studios

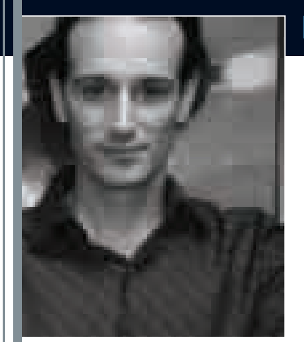
First computer:
"A Spectrum +3, the one with the disk drive. I remember making games with my sister aged six on that. Well, I say making games but it was more copying programs out of magazines but it felt like I was making them."

First game:
Quake III mod Fortress.

Career highlights:
Zapper (2002), *Lilo & Stitch* (2002)

What would be your three desert island games?
"*The Secret of Monkey Island II* (I loved the humour), the original *Quake*, and *Zelda: A Link To The Past* on the SNES. *Zelda* destroyed six months of my life – great graphics and gameplay, and every time you thought it was about to end it went on."

Looking to the future:
"I've always wanted to work on strategy games like *Civilization* and *Age Of Empires*. And I guess *Black & White II* is a bit like that so this is always something I wanted to do."



The Players

FROM FORCING OUR FINGERS TO DANCE AROUND A PAD AND LURING US INTO WAILING LIKE A BANSHEE IN FRONT OF OUR FRIENDS, HARMONIX HAS KEPT US BUSY. WE CATCH UP WITH ALEX RIGOPULOS TO FIND OUT HOW IT'S DONE…



ALEX RIGOPULOS

HARMONIX

When you think of music games, one developer springs to mind – Harmonix. Despite being years old, titles such as *Amplitude* and *Frequency* still provide a challenge and are regularly played just to check we've still got what it takes to beat Herbie Hancock on Insane difficulty. Surely it must have taken years of development experience to create games that show such a huge amount of innovation and quality? Apparently not, as Alex Rigopulos, co-founder and CEO of Harmonix, explains…

"The company was started by Eran Egozy and myself as soon as we left school and it didn't have anything to do with videogames," says Rigopulos. "Rather, we were motivated to try to solve what we considered to be an un-addressed problem, which is [that] playing music is too damned hard." It's a fair point, but getting round this problem isn't an obvious way to get into gaming. So how do you go from trying to overcome the difficulty of learning an instrument to creating the most addictive music games around?

"Just about everyone tries to learn to play an instrument at some point," he explains. "Then the overwhelming majority of those people give it up and so they spend the rest of their lives passionately playing air guitar but having no outlet to express themselves musically. We started Harmonix to invent new ways to let non-musicians have access to the profound pleasure that comes from making music."

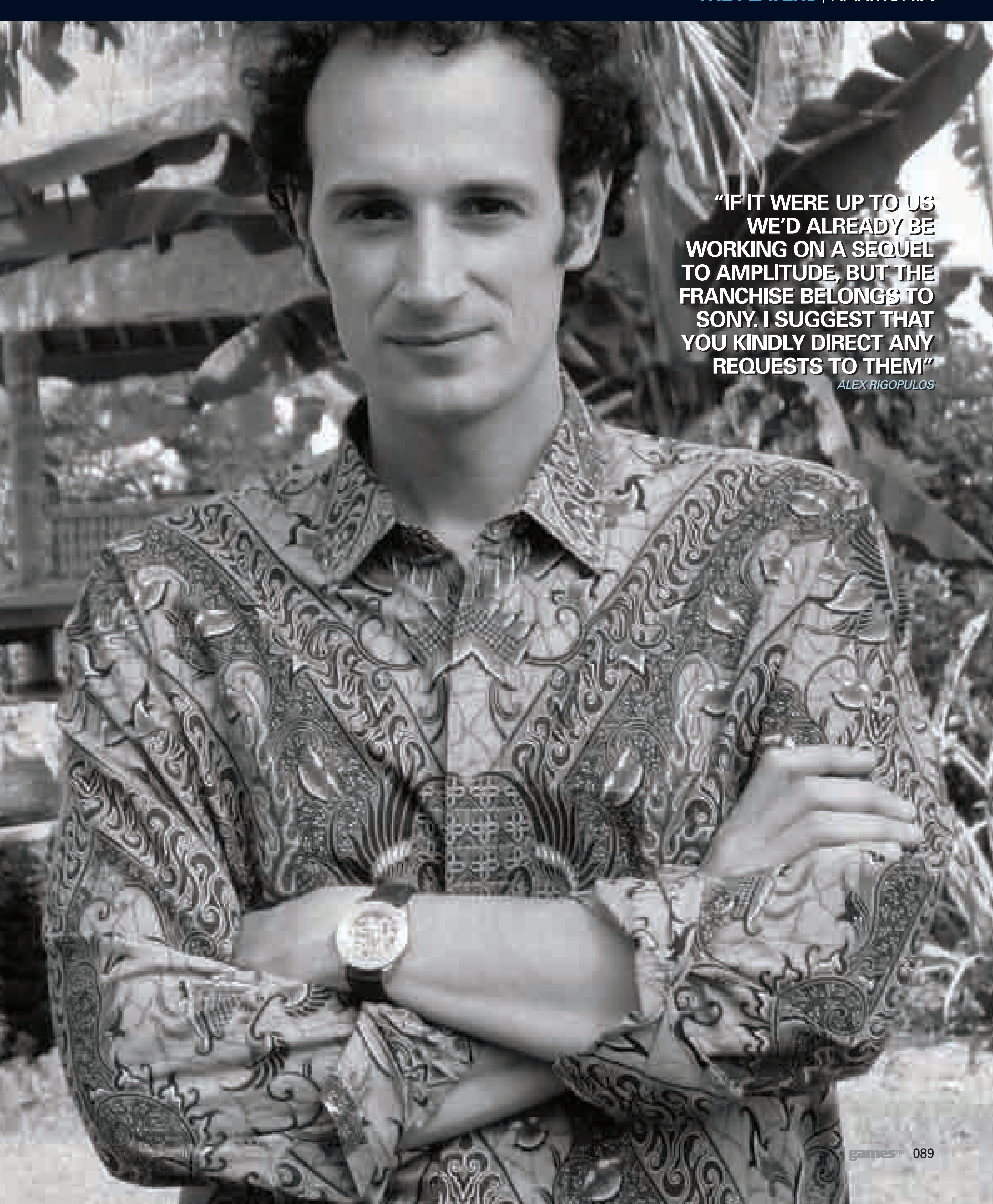
After spending several years making interactive music software, it was when music games first appeared in the Japanese arcades that Rigopulos and Egozy realised they could help frustrated musicians through games, so they started work on *Frequency* – a title that would challenge the reflexes of gamers for years to come. However, Rigopulos has a good reason for his games being so finger-bendingly awesome. "Gamers have an incredibly deep and sophisticated skill set that they've developed from playing games all their lives," he explains. "We recognised that some of these skills – namely, the ability to quickly respond to a complex stream of visual information with precisely timed manual responses – are not so different from those employed by a musician."

It's this way of thinking that has set Harmonix apart. Shunning generic templates and favouring the genuinely innovative, the studio has a reputable back catalogue. But it must be irritating to see other companies releasing games that are more successful despite being less innovative. "I've been attending E3 for nine years," says Rigopulos. "Every year I look at hundreds of games – the annual creative output of the entire industry. Every year I just see the same few games released over and over again. This is tragic, but I do suspect that this creative stagnation will come back to haunt the publishers. Sooner or later I think the gaming audience is going to get pretty tired of being fed the same old games. When they do, they'll have plenty of other places to throw their income, and the publishers will get burned."

We can understand his frustration. Despite some of Harmonix's titles being highly acclaimed, they've slipped by many gamers – an unfortunate situation that's seeing many people miss out on some quality titles. "We learnt a valuable lesson early on," Rigopulos admits. "We knew that we had succeeded in creating excellent games, and we naïvely believed that the commercial success would be proportional. We learned the hard way that it's simply not enough to make a great game. You also need to make a great package that captivates people. We did learn a great deal from that experience, though, and we've applied this knowledge to some other projects that are now in the works."

Ah, new projects. Now that's what we wanted to hear. We're still waiting for another *Amplitude*, so what's Harmonix planning? "We have a new rhythm game coming out later this year in the US – a guitar simulation game called *Guitar Hero*," Rigopulos tells us. "I'm pretty excited about this game. It's going to be a hell of a lot of fun. We also have a number of new music games in the works for 2006. All I can say about them for now is that if you were a fan of *Frequency* and *Amplitude* you'll be probably be pretty happy about the direction we're headed with some of our newest projects…"

Guitar Hero for PlayStation2 is previewed on page 44



"IF IT WERE UP TO US WE'D ALREADY BE WORKING ON A SEQUEL TO AMPLITUDE, BUT THE FRANCHISE BELONGS TO SONY. I SUGGEST THAT YOU KINDLY DIRECT ANY REQUESTS TO THEM"
ALEX RIGOPULOS

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, games™ VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE JET OFF TO DENMARK TO HANG OUT WITH IO INTERACTIVE



IO INTERACTIVE

DENMARK'S PREMIER STUDIO ESTABLISHED ITSELF WITH THE SUPREMELY POPULAR HITMAN GAMES. AS IT PREPARES ITSELF FOR WORLD DOMINATION WITH THE LATEST INSTALMENT – BLOOD MONEY – GAMES™ HOPPED OVER TO COPENHAGEN TO GET THE LOWDOWN FROM THE GREAT DANES AT IO INTERACTIVE

Many people probably don't realise that the team behind the *Hitman* games is Danish. Perhaps the distinct lack of Peter Schmeichel lookalikes and streaky bacon in the story of Agent 47 threw people off. Stereotyping aside, however, Denmark is not a country many would associate with commercially successful videogame properties – surely those are the realm of the UK, US and Japan? Not any more. The development community is expanding globally, and IO Interactive is on the brink of greatness.

Clearly, developing the *Hitman* series as well as the incredibly underrated *Freedom Fighters* has helped set IO apart, but its Danish base has been a boon as well. "It's nice, because it makes us memorable," explains Rasmus Hoejengaard, game director on IO's latest project, *Hitman: Blood Money*. "People think 'Ooh, it's that cool studio in that little northern country'." A cool studio it certainly is. A three-storey cylinder of steel, glass, open-plan offices and white walls, it matches the progressive nature of its inhabitants. Being away from the hubbub of a major gaming city allows IO to concentrate on what it does best – making games. And working out of a 'non-gaming' country hasn't hindered its success so far. "We're owned by a foreign company, so we don't really need to market ourselves; the games and Eidos do that," adds Hojengaard.

Eidos recently completed the purchase of IO Interactive, hopefully offering the studio an increased presence on the world stage, and IO seems happy with that. "Eidos' involvement in our games has always been positive, and the way that this teamwork has manifested itself has not changed because of the merger," Hoejengaard says. "This would, of course, not necessarily be the case for all mergers, but I can only speak on our behalf." The downside of this merger is the end of the excellent *Freedom Fighters* franchise, published by Electronic Arts. However, it's clear IO has used what it learned on *Freedom Fighters* with *Hitman: Blood Money*, the advanced cover and combat system being just one example. This is a studio that's determined to remain progressive and learn at every opportunity.

So how is such a successful studio formed? IO has had to group together a core of programmers and designers that are clear in their goals and motivated to create something special and worthwhile. "Creating successful teams is, of course, the foundation of doing good games, so therefore the teams are carefully put together so that the workforce can cover all aspects of designing a game with competence," says Hoejengaard. "We usually only hire people with game experience, unless they have some extreme talent that we cannot turn down." This quest for the best and most experienced staff is what keeps quality



IO's modern offices may seem rather cold, but the team is as dedicated and passionate as they can be about videogames.

high at IO, but JP Kurup, lead animator on *Hitman: Blood Money*, acknowledges that it can be hard for people to break into the industry. "Usually you will need experience to get a job, but how are you supposed to get that experience without being able to get a job? Catch-22."

If getting into the industry is hard, it's pretty stressful once you're there, particularly given the current trend for bankable licences and franchises, which some feel is stifling creativity. "I think there is a trend of marketing concerns governing too much of the creative process at the moment," says Kurup. "This is clearly a result of the majority of games doing badly and only a few titles making it big. Everyone is scrambling to be a part of those few, and in the process we're missing the point somewhat. You can't make a truly great game if you try to assemble a Frankenstein thing out of features that tested well in a focus. Ninjas in cars committing crime for revenge in space. What?!" It's refreshing to hear such honesty from a developer – perhaps IO's isolation from the traditional hotspots of the industry lets it look from the outside in. However, as IO has only been established for seven years it hasn't been around long enough to become thoroughly jaded, and still believes that publishers will pick up original ideas if studios know how to sell them. "If you have a great concept you really believe in, then describe it thoroughly,"

> "**NINJAS** IN **CARS** COMMITTING **CRIME** FOR **REVENGE** IN SPACE. **WHAT?!**"
>
> JP KURUP, LEAD ANIMATOR

says Kurup. "Also, you will have to have an idea of which questions marketing people will ask you – and be ready to answer them with confidence. They have a big say in things – after all, publishers need to be able to sell the game you make."

IO's understanding of the industry is mixed with equal measures of confidence and scepticism – the staff offer concise and candid views on most aspects of gaming, including

BIRD OF PREY

One of the best elements of the *Hitman* series is how Agent 47 can 'acquire' different outfits to disguise himself. That said, we doubt stealing this man's costume will help much…

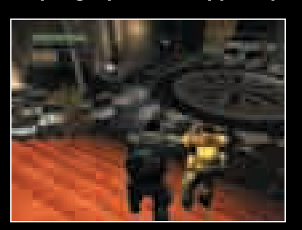
HELLO, IO…

1 RASMUS HOEJENGAARD
GAME DIRECTOR
IN A NUTSHELL: After working as a weapon, vehicle and level designer on previous IO games, Hoejengaard has worked his way up to game director on *Blood Money* in his five years at the company.

2 JP KURUP
LEAD ANIMATOR
IN A NUTSHELL: Considering *Hitman 2* was one of the first games to feature rag-doll physics, Kurup is one of the best in the business. The ultra-lifelike movements in *Blood Money* are his crowning achievement.

I WON'T LET YOU DOWN

It had the graphics, the music, the gameplay and the story, but IO's *Freedom Fighters* didn't sell. The game was a superb squad-based tactical shooter set in Manhattan in a parallel universe – the Cold War hasn't ended, Europe is under communist control and the Russians are moving in on New York. *Freedom Fighters* satirises the American dream, placing you in control of a plumber who has to take New York back from the reds. The game plays it so straight that many may have balked when Chris Stone hoisted the Stars and Stripes to a hilarious chorus of 'Yeah!'. Aside from the subtle satire, the game was wonderfully immersive, challenging and downright fun. Try to get yourself a copy today.



the next generation of hardware. "I'm not sure they're going to be the quantum leap everyone is hoping for," says Kurup. Hoejengaard agrees: "To begin with, the next-gen titles will only exploit a fragment of the capabilities of these new works of wonder; you can no longer satisfy people with nice graphics – everyone can do that. You need to give the players more stimulation and simulation, both physically and mentally." So how should developers do this? "Games are going to have to expand in scope," Hoejengaard explains. "Physics, dynamic environments and large development teams will enable developers to add a welcome level of complexity, both in terms of gameplay and storytelling." With *Hitman: Blood Money* remaining faithful to the current generation, will we see IO take the next logical step and move into next-gen development in the future? "I will not go into details about this, but I'm not expecting you've seen the last of *Hitman*," says Hoejengaard. He may be keeping quiet, but it's almost a certainty that a blossoming studio like IO will be taking full advantage of the raw power the next generation will provide. The next gen will surely give IO the platform it needs to create games with an atmosphere and narrative on a par with the best movies.

The *Hitman* games are already undoubtedly cinematic. The brooding music, tone and atmosphere are clear nods to the movie industry. The missions themselves are often very reminiscent of famous film scenes – the slaughterhouse level in *Contracts* wears its *Blade* influences on its sleeve, and is all the better for it. As a studio, IO is aware that a decent game has to be more than just the sum of its parts. Like the best films, a classic, narrative-driven game must etch itself into the mind of the player, leaving a lasting impression that goes beyond simple gameplay mechanics. So it could be argued that the games and cinema industries are converging. "The scope of the game projects themselves are beginning to approach those of movies, and maturing a bit," agrees Kurup. "Overall, I think it's a good thing, because ours is still an amateurish medium."

However, Kurup is keen to point out that he doesn't want the games industry to mimic the major Hollywood studios' output, pointing out that there will "always be a need for independent garage games", but he reaffirms IO's progressive nature. "Storytelling is something we need to learn from cinema," he says. "Right now it seems that gameplay and story are mutually exclusive. They needn't be, and it's getting better all the time. The Japanese seem to have a better technical grasp of the storytelling process than us gaijins, especially when it comes to character relations. Though they do it in their own Japanese style, I find that the



THE FILTH AND THE FURY

The *Hitman* franchise has had no shortage of bad publicity over the years, with *Hitman 2* even earning TV news coverage over its infamous Sikh temple level. Rasmus Hoejengaard is very frank when discussing such a contentious issue. "We got a lot of good publicity from that actually, so I don't necessarily see it as a bad thing," he says. "Some groups are very, very sensitive." However, he's quick to re-establish the firm's original argument. "None of this was done deliberately, it was all coincidental – something looked like something that looked like something, and to be honest we all found it a bit ridiculous." Undoubtedly 'bad' publicity is something IO is all too keen to exploit. Reports of the original *GTA*'s exploits on *Newsnight* were responsible for a sudden huge boost in sales. Thankfully, like some firms, IO still realises that gameplay must come first, and it can't rest on its morally dubious laurels.

"YOU CAN NO LONGER **SATISFY PEOPLE WITH NICE GRAPHICS**. YOU NEED TO GIVE PLAYERS **MORE STIMULATION – MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY**"
RASMUS HOEJENGAARD, GAME DIRECTOR

only games that have been able to really get me involved enough in a character to get me worried about them are Japanese games."

With the continuing exploits of enigmatic Agent 47, IO is moving closer to this style of character and story development it so admires, again showing that it's a studio that learns, improves and grows at every opportunity – something that's obvious when looking at *Blood Money* (check out the preview on page 72 to find out just why). A team that's prepared to concentrate on ironing out the faults of its previous games, as opposed to cramming new titles with the latest marketable fluff, is more than welcome in an industry that often seems determined to choke the life out of originality. At this rate, IO looks certain to keep bringing home the bacon, Danish or otherwise.

THE MAN IN BLACK

His first appearance might not have been hugely popular, but Agent 47 has swiftly become a figurehead for IO, not to mention an important part of the emergence of the stealth genre. Solid Snake and Sam Fisher might be sneaky, but Agent 47 is downright brutal, which is why we love him so.

IT'S OFF TO WORK WE GO…

HITMAN: CODENAME 47 [2000, PC]

The game that started it all. An immensely ambitious title that, although fundamentally flawed, sold fantastically well and was the launching point for a franchise that eventually made a successful leap to consoles. The myriad ways of carrying out a hit is an element many games still fail to recreate.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS [2003, Multi]

Published by Electronic Arts, this squad-based shooter mixed atmosphere and fuss-free squad mechanics with great success. Unfortunately, critical acclaim didn't mean great sales, and many gamers missed out on a near-classic title. Check out the 'I Won't Let You Down' boxout for more details.

HITMAN: CONTRACTS [2004, PC]

Agent 47's personality started to come to the fore in IO's third *Hitman* game. A spectacular light-blooming technique lent the game a unique look, and the infamous slaughterhouse level guaranteed publicity. It was let down by niggling problems, all of which have been addressed in *Blood Money*.

"WE GOT TOGETHER A COOL TEAM AND PUT THE WHOLE THING TOGETHER OURSELVES. IT WAS FUELLED BY PASSION AND PIZZA"

RICK GOODMAN



The Players

AFTER BEING TURNED DOWN BY VARIOUS DEVELOPERS DUE TO 'A LACK OF EXPERIENCE', RICK GOODMAN WENT ON TO SET UP NOT ONE, BUT TWO SUCCESSFUL STUDIOS. WE ASKED HIM ABOUT THE SECRET OF HIS SUCCESS…

RICK GOODMAN

STAINLESS STEEL STUDIOS

Real-time strategy games eat up our time in the same way starving monkeys chomp bananas. To review an RTS takes days of ordering units to collect whatever serves as currency in the particular era you're playing within, then building up civilisations. This time-intensive gameplay doesn't deter us from playing, though, as these are some of the most involving games around, and a man responsible for many of them is Rick Goodman, co-founder of Ensemble and now president of Stainless Steel.

"I was actually an accountant about ten years ago," he begins. "And I kind of decided that it might be more fun to make games, so that's exactly what we did. I got together with my brother and we started a game company. We started very small and eventually grew." The studio Goodman is talking about is Ensemble, the company behind the hugely successful *Age Of Empires* series. These games are rated among the best RTS titles on the market and prove that whatever your budget, it's the effort that's put in that affects the quality of a title. "We did work really hard on that game," Goodman tells us. "We got together a cool team and put the whole thing together ourselves. It was fuelled by passion and pizza. None of us on the team had any experience in making games, except for one or two people, so that was a real test and a true challenge. After that, I came back home to Boston, Massachusetts, and started up a company called Stainless Steel, which is now making *Rise And Fall*."

From what we've seen, *Rise And Fall* will stick closely to the formula that made Goodman's Ensemble titles so popular (only this time it seems a greater emphasis has been put on graphics). We see many developers specialising in a genre in this way, and it's usually the players that benefit, but Goodman hasn't ventured outside the RTS genre since he started in the industry – doesn't he tire of creating the same elements time after time? "I personally got into this industry because I love real-time strategy games," he says. "And I think for the last ten years the industry has been making some really fine RTS titles. I also think in the last three or four years we've been a little bit guilty of not stretching ourselves quite enough, and not pushing the envelope in terms of new and innovative things we can do with the genre."

Maybe this is part of what influenced his decision to leave Ensemble and start up Stainless Steel. It was certainly a brave move as the company had formed a solid relationship with Microsoft off the back of *Age Of Empires* and was set for great things, but this lack of creativity has been responsible for many talented individuals flying the nest in search of opportunities. In fact, Goodman agrees with the view that a lack of creativity may soon cause major problems and changes within the industry. "I think as the industry matures it's also going to consolidate from both a development side and a publishing side," he tells us. "I've seen a little of that in my short time of being in London. In the US, we have a lot of competing cell phone companies; here I see Vodafone everywhere with a little bit of T-Mobile, so as the market matures we do see consolidation and I don't honestly know what that might mean in the future for creativity, whether that's a plus or a minus – we'll just have to wait and see."

Goodman hasn't just confined himself to the RTS genre, he's also never worked outside the PC format. Although this is obviously down to his genre working best on the PC, the launch of the next-gen consoles will provide many new opportunities for developers, giving those bound to the PC more options. So will we be seeing future Stainless Steel titles on consoles? "It's always possible," Goodman says with a shrug, "but we don't have any direct plans. One of the things that we've noticed with the way in which we've conceived *Rise And Fall* is that it's already become a more console-like experience in some ways. If we wanted to we could easily pick up on that and move more along those lines, and I think that's a way to get a more action-orientated strategy game on a console, and I certainly think that is a very exciting idea."

Rise And Fall is out on PC on 31 December and was previewed in issue 30



It's war on a global scale. Only it's tiny. But this time it's bigger. Confused? Don't worry, – it's *FamicomWars DS*…

FamicomWars DS 98



THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't mean it's necessarily bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning scores are our genuine opinion; we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just try ing help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

REVIEWS

FAMICOMWARS DS

I FOUGHT THE WAR AND THE WAR WON

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Intelligent Systems

PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
30 September
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1 (2-8 via Wi-Fi)

Much as Nintendo's 'new ways of playing games' ethos might not sit right with some gamers, it's looking more and more like it will make competition between the DS and the imminent PSP quite a remarkable spectacle. While Sony basically offers a portable version of its home consoles, Nintendo makes up for technical shortcomings with unique features like voice input, touch-screen control and an extra screen. It doesn't always work – hell, it often doesn't – but when these new features are put to good use, the result is usually a gameplay experience that simply can't be obtained elsewhere.

Still, despite *FamicomWars DS*'s obvious inherent quality, it would be all too easy to let your inner cynic get the better of you during the first few levels. The tutorial speech is almost painfully patronising to anyone with any real strategy experience (let alone those who played the previous games), the twin screens aren't really put to much use, and you're not exactly presented with any real reasons why this couldn't have been a GBA game. But as the campaign rolls on, the miniaturised armies really start to feel at home on the DS. The extra screen gets some interesting use, stylus control becomes second nature, and with the prospect of wireless multiplayer thrown in too there can't be a strategic brain in the land that hasn't started drooling in an unsightly manner (however a brain might go about drooling). But that isn't important – the main point to be made here is that Intelligent Systems' adorable war series is stronger today than it ever has been.

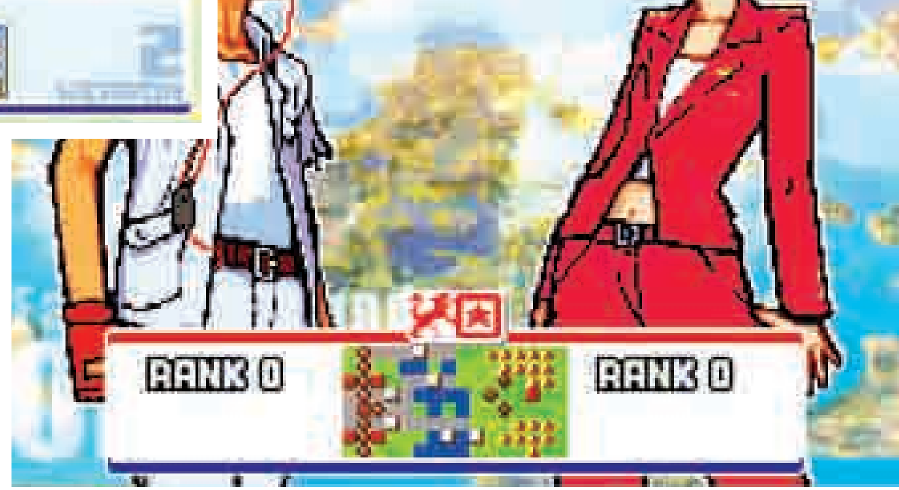
A large part of this comes courtesy of some greatly improved AI, one of the very elements people found fault with in the pair of GBA *Advance War* titles. Enemy units will hold back until your forces come into range rather than rushing headlong into your rather obvious artillery traps; infantry now makes much more of a concerted effort to capture and protect properties; environmental factors such as missile silos and pipes are now treated just as well by the CPU as you'd expect a human player to do. There's the odd hiccup here and there, sure, and when command of your troops on the second screen is left to the DS hardware it elects to make some very strange decisions indeed. Luckily, you can take the power back with a simple trip into



The Stealth is the airborne equivalent of the Submarine.



Pick a team that works well and your Tag CO Power will be even more effective than usual.



gamesTM CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

COMBAT: Up to eight players can enjoy real-time shenanigans from a single cartridge.

WAR: Get together with other *FamicomWars* players and full-scale tactical encounters are possible.

WI-FI DELIRIOUS

While linking up wirelessly with friends who own the game is the same fare as it's always been, the single-cart options are slightly more limited. For a start, download play only allows you and your chums to compete in Combat mode, the game's new real-time action mode. While it's a shame that there's no single-cart support for the game's main selling point, Combat is far more entertaining than it first seems, especially when you're trying to juggle attack and defence against multiple opponents. The mode takes its cues from its Atari 2600 namesake – move and shoot to eliminate enemy units or sneak to their bases and take the whole army out in one go. Great fun in a retro kind of way.

the options menu, and with both forces under your watchful eye there's a whole lot less confusion. For the most part, though, there's been a wonderful overhaul of one of the series' most criticised elements.

Elsewhere, there are plenty of other noticeable tweaks and additions, including the rather obvious area of the catalogue of tools on offer to the budding general. Adding too many new units could play havoc with the balancing of the game, but as you might expect, there are still a few new vehicles and weapons on offer. Piperunners are effectively turrets that patrol pipelines and rain death on any units foolish enough to move nearby, while the new Megatanks pretty much dominate every other unit in the game. Taking them down can be a real nightmare – a powered-up CO can really safeguard their own half of the map with a couple of these little (well, massive) beauties. But with minimal fuel and ammo supplies, offensive duties are often still best left to Neotanks and support units lest the most expensive unit available becomes an immobile and defenceless waste of resources. The balance of the game remains such that every unit has its strengths, weaknesses and uses and be it Mech Infantry or Bomber, every possible unit will see service over the course of the game.

But probably our favourite addition to the super-deformed carnage is the CO progression. After each victory your chosen commanders receive a healthy amount of experience; once enough has been accumulated, he/she goes up a rank. With this numerical increase comes a selection of upgrades that can be allocated to them, ranging from slight damage bonuses or cash for damaging opponents to more potent abilities such as penalty-free movement over any terrain. The ability to equip up to four of these at any one time adds an even greater amount of freedom and tactical depth to the proceedings – admittedly, you can only really capitalise on these bonuses once you know the ins and outs of each particular map but once you get the hang of reading the layouts before the battles start it's just a matter of picking the right CO for the job. ▷

"FOR THE MOST PART, THERE'S BEEN A WONDERFUL OVERHAUL OF THE ADVANCED WARS SERIES' MOST CRITICISED ELEMENTS"





■ Even though there are no options coded into the game for them, allegiances are a staple part of four-way encounters. Choose your allies well…







■ Even without the territorial advantage, attacking first is pretty much always preferable to having to launch a counter strike.





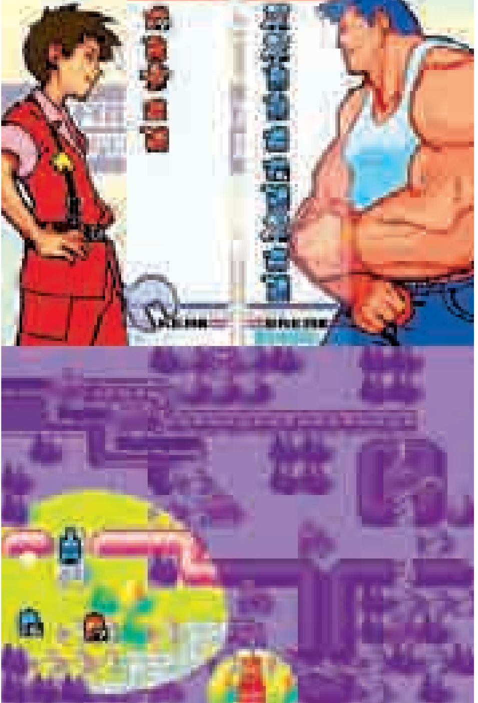
Mech Infantry hiding in the woods is a great and inexpensive trap that can catch most units unawares.

"INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS HAS COME GOOD FOR ADVANCE WARS FANS AND MADE THIS GAME ARGUABLY THE BEST REASON TO OWN A DS SO FAR"

But what of the hardware? We've seen the DS's twin screens wasted in the past (an unwieldy steering wheel? A few extra moves to choose from? Hmm…) but, thankfully, while *FamicomWars DS* by no means relies on the second screen, it does use it as well as can be expected without entering gimmick territory. Unit and terrain stats often give way to a second battlefield or a monitor view of some form of impending doom – the latter is fairly pointless really but engaging in two simultaneous clashes is a cranial workout the like of which has yet to be seen on the DS. Even when used for information, it's quite handy for on-the-fly reminders of strengths, weaknesses and movement restrictions. The variety of extra battle types that grace the top screen during the game's Campaign keeps the whole thing that little bit more interesting than it has been, and the ability to send units between maps adds yet another set of choices on which victory can hinge.

Theoretically speaking, the stylus should provide the perfect interface for this style of



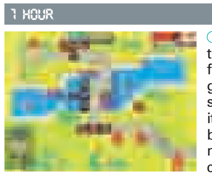


Ah, the Black Bomb. Has there ever been a better way to weaken entire platoons of enemies at once? No, there hasn't. It's really quite good, you know.

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

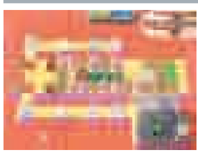
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

1 HOUR



With the first few tutorial missions finished, you'll be getting a feel for stylus control. Yeah, it's *Advance Wars* but there's so much more to it than you can know just yet…

1 WEEK



With persistence, you could have beaten the single-player campaign. More likely you've reached a sticking point and are whiling away time in the free modes.

1 YEAR



You've probably seen most of what the game has to offer but have you done everything? Powering up COs and smashing your mates in multiplayer will never get old.

COLOR ME BADD

It's clear from the CO progression options that Intelligent Systems wants players to make their favourite CO very much their own, but within Edit mode lies a little extra something to assist in this pursuit. As well as being able to set up skills and abilities to your liking, you're now also able to change the colour of your CO's outfit, hair and skin. Options here are admittedly minimal but it's a great feature for players who are all too used to seeing Andy's same old cheery grin time and time again. We particularly like dressing Olaf up like Father Christmas and using his Blizzard ability to bombard the hell out of the enemy – like Santa's gone all evil or something. We're strange like that.



It's all a bit silly but the real-time Combat mode is a lot more fun than you'd imagine.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MOON UNIT: Several new troop types make battles even more varied than ever.

DO-IT-ALL: Two screens of action to juggle – will you rise to the challenge or let the AI do your bidding?

game and, for the most part, this is the case. Moving units takes but two taps of the screen and even the menus are a joy to navigate in this way. The only real concern arises from the slight size of both units and menu selections on the screen. It can be a little easy to make errors in selections and you really have to keep your wits about you – a simple tap of 'End' rather than 'Attack' can be all it takes to hand victory to your opponent on a plate. Still, it's not as though concentration is an alien concept in the *Wars* world and the solution is simple: for those bumpy bus rides, just switch to the D-pad for a while. The classic control mechanic is still in place but even despite the amount of hours we ploughed into the *Advance Wars* games, a few minutes with the stylus set-up was all it took to sell us on the new controls.

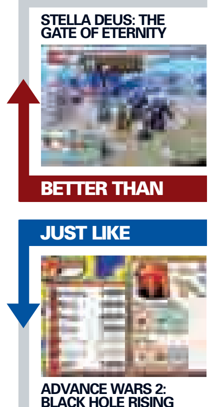


The Mapmaker tool ensures that you'll never run out of places to ruin your enemies to pieces. Awesome.

FamicomWars DS joins Kirby's latest outing as rare proof that Nintendo's feature-packed handheld can play host to proper games as well as the slew of glorified mini-games and ports to which owners have been subjected. Not only that, Intelligent Systems has come good for *Advance Wars* fans the world over and made its latest title arguably the best reason to own a DS so far. Effortlessly putting to good use those unique aspects of the handheld that so many other developers exploit purely to tick boxes, Intelligent Systems once again proves itself an invaluable asset for Nintendo. *FamicomWars DS* is a game of practically limitless possibilities, and between the mountain of stats, modes and unlockables, the multiplayer options and the good old mapmaker tool, you'll be playing and enjoying this until the day Mario retires. Another feather in Nintendo's cap, then, on the eve of the PSP's European launch. This handheld war just got advanced…

VERDICT 9/10

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS' FINEST WORK TO DATE

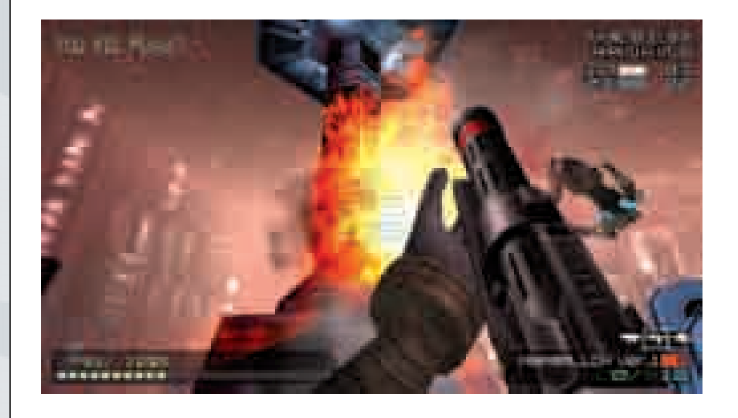


FAQs

Q. HOW FAR CAN COS PROGRESS?
After Rank 9, COs max out at Rank *, offering some very tasty abilities indeed.

Q. LIKE WHAT?
Increased repair rates? Cheaper units? Infantry spawn during CO powers? There are more than enough awesome abilities.

Q. ANY EXTRAS?
With the *Advance Wars 1+2* cart in the GBA slot, a few cheap maps and so forth appear in the shop. Lovely.





FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FUTURIFFIC: This is the first of a new wave of handheld FPSs in terms of visuals and playability.

ATMOS: The visual style, combined with various spot effects, is very convincing and attractive.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥4,980

RELEASE
September '05
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

CODED ARMS

It was only to be expected that Konami has been hugely confident in the run-up to the release of *Coded Arms*, if only because it truly believed it was onto a winner. It knew it was creating the first FPS on the PSP, which gives it a certain amount of kudos anyway. It knew that visually there's never been anything else like *Coded Arms* on a handheld. And, based on the list of gameplay-related attributes on show, it even believes that the game is a must-have for PSP owners. However, that remarkably thin line between well-deserved faith in a product and over-confidence simply because of the circumstances of release is one that Konami should be mindful of, especially when that product walks the line so precariously it's liable to fall over it at any minute.

That isn't say that *Coded Arms* isn't an achievement – indeed, a quick glimpse at the game being played (particularly on one of the later stages) would suggest that Konami has worked wonders with Sony's handheld. This is mostly down to the game's almighty atmosphere; set within the heart of a rogue sentient computer system as it is, *Coded Arms* goes overboard realising a world rich with *Tron*-like references and visual stylings that help create the illusion that you really are hacking into this system through your PSP. Everything from the way the walls glitch when shot and destructible scenery disintegrates into a wireframe model of itself before exploding in a shower of code, to how you handle weapons and items is all tailored so as not to spoil the façade. While stylistic similarities may bring to mind both *Metal Gear Solid* and *Zone Of The Enders* (particularly when it comes to the enemy character design), the game does a convincing job of creating this unique world right up until the second your pixels get splattered all over the floor by some marauding enemy program.

And they will, believe us. If there's one thing that *Coded Arms* is, it's difficult; almost unfairly so, in fact, given the false sense of security



Supposedly, electrical weapons are best against robotic enemies, but a shotgun to the face works just as well.

Big guns are great, but a lack of lock-on makes using them successfully a real pain.



ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL

Just as the stages in *Coded Arms* fall into three categories, so do the enemies; soldiers, robots and bugs are each susceptible to a certain type of weapon (physical, electrical and light respectively) so it's important you go in armed appropriately… or at least, it would be if those weaknesses actually made any difference. Truth is, it simply comes down to hitting the enemy with the most appropriate thing you've got: rapid fire for small enemies, powerful single-shot weapons for close-range combat, and high-level explosives for anything bigger than you. Unfortunately, the random creation of the levels also applies to the item drops so you never know what sort of ammo you're going to get.



With an annoyingly long and uncontrollable throwing arc, grenades are incredibly hard to use with any accuracy.

induced by the earlier stages. These opening levels are almost too small – in many cases, the map will inform you that you've already cleared a large percentage of the level by simply materialising in the room – and their enemies weak and slow-witted. Just two sectors in, however, the going gets tougher; maps become sprawling affairs and enemies begin flying, jumping and sprinting around in an attempt to wipe you off the face of the system. And that's before we've mentioned the bosses that appear at the end of each sector – hulking monsters packing enough firepower to destroy you utterly without even trying.

Strangely though, all this suggests that *Coded Arms'* gameplay is packed full of challenge and entertainment, yet the actual experience of playing it is a remarkably hollow and limited affair. To suggest that the original *Doom* is sophisticated by comparison may seem a little unfair, but it's true – at least that had you activating switches and collecting keys to progress. All *Coded Arms* does is have you move from room to room through the randomly created maps, blasting anything that moves – particularly if it glows blue and therefore takes the role of a gatekeeper that, when destroyed, goes some way to unlocking the gate to the next stage. Never mind that there are lots of weapons to find, many of which are identical save for different elemental properties, or that you can look up and down and even jump; when the actual gameplay is more rudimentary and repetitive than the 12-year-old innovator of the FPS genre, you know there's a problem.

What's more, *Coded Arms* (much like several other titles to appear on this handheld) suffers from the limitations of the PSP's hardware configuration. True, you can customise the controls to your liking, but when the faux analogue stick doesn't allow nearly enough of the kind of precision you need for a fast-paced FPS and the clunky shoulder buttons make simultaneous rapid weapons fire and movement difficult, what could have been a fairly enjoyable (if rather basic and arduous) shooter becomes a lesson in frustration and annoyance.

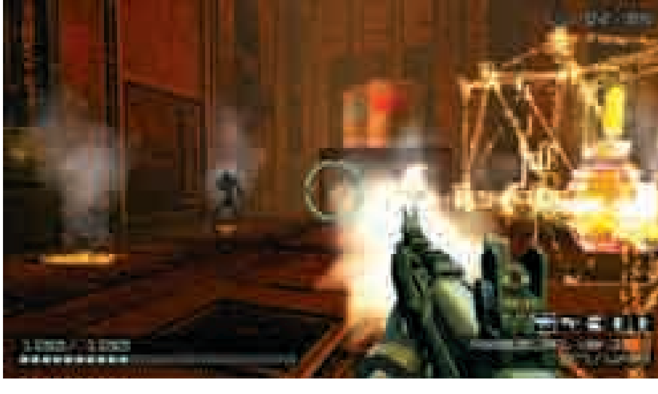
FAQs

Q. IT SOUNDS A BIT BASIC…
And it is. But a handheld FPS with limited controls never was going to be ground-breaking, was it?

Q. TOO SHORT?
Not really – although the levels only get longer, not more complicated. Can you cope with repetition?

Q. CONTROLS?
Fiddly, to say the least. You can certainly get the hang of them but the PSP's analogue stick isn't built for accuracy in an FPS environment.





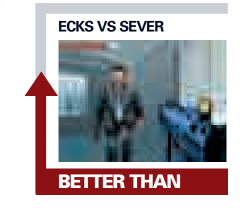
Visually, *Coded Arms* is full of nice touches but the gameplay just doesn't have the same depth.

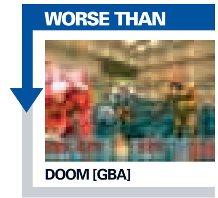
Certainly, *Coded Arms* delivers a visual feast but that should have always been the case anyway – the PSP is a powerful beast and would have appeared second-rate had Konami's efforts not looked as good as they do. Rather, the issue here is that underneath all the flash and style there's a game that's no deeper than your average puddle; a blaster of mediocre proportions that might keep you hooked through sheer determination to see it through (if only because you'll be convinced that mastery of the twitchy controls is actually possible), but isn't actually much fun to play. Call us cynics, but the pile of PSP games that falls into this category is growing bigger by the month – something that Sony can't afford to let happen if it wants to win this handheld war it has started.



VERDICT 5/10
A VAPID WOLF IN BEAUTIFUL SHEEP'S CLOTHING



ECKS VS SEVER

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

DOOM [GBA]



If we were going to build a robot it would be a huge killing machine. Chibi's not without his charms though.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥5,800

RELEASE
TBC
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

CHIBI-ROBO

NINTENDO PROVIDES SOME GOOD, CLEAN FUN

We've finally come to terms with the fact that we're never going to own any real, live Pikmin. We've said on many occasions in the past that the thought of having tiny little creatures running around picking up tat for us is an appealing one, but we suppose we can make do with just playing the games – it's a cruel world. Now, though, Nintendo has managed to do it again, forcing us to crave possession of something we are never likely to obtain. We speak of sweet little *Chibi-Robo*.

Despite this game being on our radar for a while now, short of a few posed pictures of the little metal hero exploring the real world and being eaten by birds, nothing has been shown and very little was known about how the title would actually play. It turns out that Chibi is essentially a tiny robot that cleans up rubbish. The scraps of paper and crisp packets that litter the Sanderson home are what he lives for, and you get to take control of him. Although cleaning up after a family doesn't sound like much of a game, as you'd expect there's far more tucked away here and you'll soon find yourself enjoying your chores. As well as a huge amount of mess, the house contains many secrets. Toys come to life when the lights go off, the doors to treasure-rich areas are locked tight and all manner of weird objects are hidden in hard to reach places – it turns out that exploring a messy house is quite an adventure for a robot that's less than a foot tall.

Much like *Pikmin*, *Chibi-Robo* is separated into days. This means that you only have a set amount of time in which to explore and perform any tasks you wish to do before you're returned to base and the areas reset so you can start over. It's a proven formula for this style of gameplay and it works as well as expected, so you'll soon find yourself hurtling around performing good deeds in order to earn the love of your family and a bit of cash. That's right, Chibi isn't performing these

I MIGHT BE RUNG

While certain areas in the rooms you're exploring look well out of your reach at the beginning of the game, killing the little robotic spiders that appear throughout the house allows you to build up a collection of nuts and bolts that will let you create ladders. These ladders, when purchased in the shop, will be dropped inside the room you bought them for and can be raised to grant you access to the previously unreachable areas of the house. Also available are teleporters that reduce the travelling time in larger rooms and preserve both time and energy. This element actually makes the game feel much larger than it is and forces you to revisit areas that you'd previously exhausted.

Night is a little more exciting than day as all the toys come to life and help you out.



Fixing this robot is only one of the tasks you'll have to do if you want to earn some love.

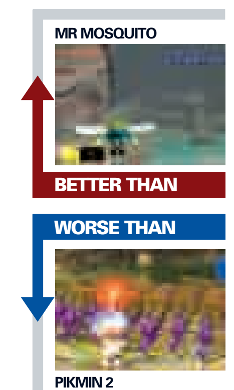
tasks out of the goodness of his heart. Even a robot needs to go shopping sometimes and gaining this love and money from your 'family' is an important part of the game. Love will boost your battery power, allowing you to travel for longer without a recharge, while cash will allow you to buy new gadgets – and you can't get far without those…

These extra toys come in many forms. From day-lengthening stopwatches through to an arm cannon used to destroy cracked walls and kill spiders, there's plenty of stuff with which you can kit out your little guy, but the stars of the show have to be the outfits you can buy for Chibi. Sure, in many ways this is just another cute gimmick to make your eyes widen and your smile stretch, but by obtaining these suits you can perform new moves that provoke certain reactions from the different characters. Dressing Chibi up in bandages and making him play dead gets you sympathy in some situations, whereas his spaceman suit allows him to impress onlookers with a super-pose.

But for all its charms, *Chibi-Robo* has its faults. The combination of a time limit and the fact that any movement drains your battery so you're constantly required to recharge at plug sockets means the game sometimes seems very disjointed – especially if you're not quite sure where you're meant to be heading – and without a translation being available it's likely that you'll spend a while mulling over the most basic puzzles simply because you've missed a piece of information. That said, we can't help but get the feeling that *Chibi-Robo* would be far too simple if we were actually capable of understanding the instructions given to us by the other characters. After all, a list of fetch quests and a spot of platforming is hardly taxing if you know exactly what you're doing and where you're going, so perhaps the language barrier is a blessing in disguise, forcing you to explore adequately so you're able to fully appreciate the twee world of *Chibi-Robo*.

When it comes down to it, as with many Nintendo products it's the 'feel' that sells this title. It's near impossible not to have fun while playing – even if you're determined to hate it – and it's one of those titles that you've really got to play to understand. *Chibi-Robo* is certainly worth a trip to your local importer.







This wooden pirate is ace, but we can't work out his name…

FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

GOOD THINGS: How many games out there allow you to play as a small cleaning robot?

SUITED AND BOOTED: How many games out there allow you dress up a small cleaning robot?

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
Depends how well you understand Japanese really. Probably not too long once a translation becomes available.

Q. BEST OUTFIT?
It's got to be the frog one – he looks adorable.

Q. SOUNDS CUTE.
It is. Very.

VERDICT 7/10
SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Veola's not the most sociable of characters, but the way she treats Lita is a highlight of your dealings with her.





Each Mana has its own special ability, with Diemia (the Mana of Earth) most useful – you can summon him to act as a stepping stone.



Some monsters appear as bosses initially then start appearing in weaker form during regular battles later on.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nippon Ichi

DEVELOPER
Gust

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

ATELIER IRIS: ETERNAL MANA

We've come to appreciate that most RPGs are, as a rule, slow-burning and lengthy efforts that take time to really get going. And if ever a game took that rule to the extreme it'd be *Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana*, almost to the point where the game suffers as a result. A sluggish opening and some lengthy speech-filled segues lead to some repetitive wandering around the same three areas over and over, which leaves you wondering whether exquisitely pretty visuals are all the game has… and then it all changes. It takes time, certainly, for Gust to draw back the veil covering much of its adventure – well over four hours, according to our watches – but when it happens, you'll finally realise what all the fuss is about.

The thing is, it's actually *Atelier Iris'* story (a fairly well-trodden tale of a young hero, Klein Kiesling in this case, striving to achieve his dream while also attempting to unknowingly save the world with the help of his friends) that's the weak link here. That isn't to say it's bad – in fact, a well-written and often funny script combined with charming and genuinely appealing (if somewhat stereotypically RPG-ish) characters manages to guide the player along just nicely. Unfortunately, it guides you a little bit too much, noticeably more so than other examples of the genre that we can think of. The enclosed world map – which, despite being fairly large, is made up of narrow paths within which there's little room to manoeuvre – doesn't really help matters. It's this that creates the impression of linearity, which is hardly a good thing when such feelings last for a substantial chunk of the game's opening.

Patience with *Atelier Iris*, however, comes with its own rewards as the game manages to open up in more creative ways (besides the mastery of the simple but solid fighting system) once you begin amassing Mana and mana. And yes, there's a difference. Taking the form of living creatures as opposed to a blanket ethereal force, Mana are the backbone of the game's alchemic focus; as such, you not only have to search high and low for them (the more you find, the more elements you can dabble in) but take care of them once they're on your team. Giving them gifts of items related to their elemental calling keeps their strength and

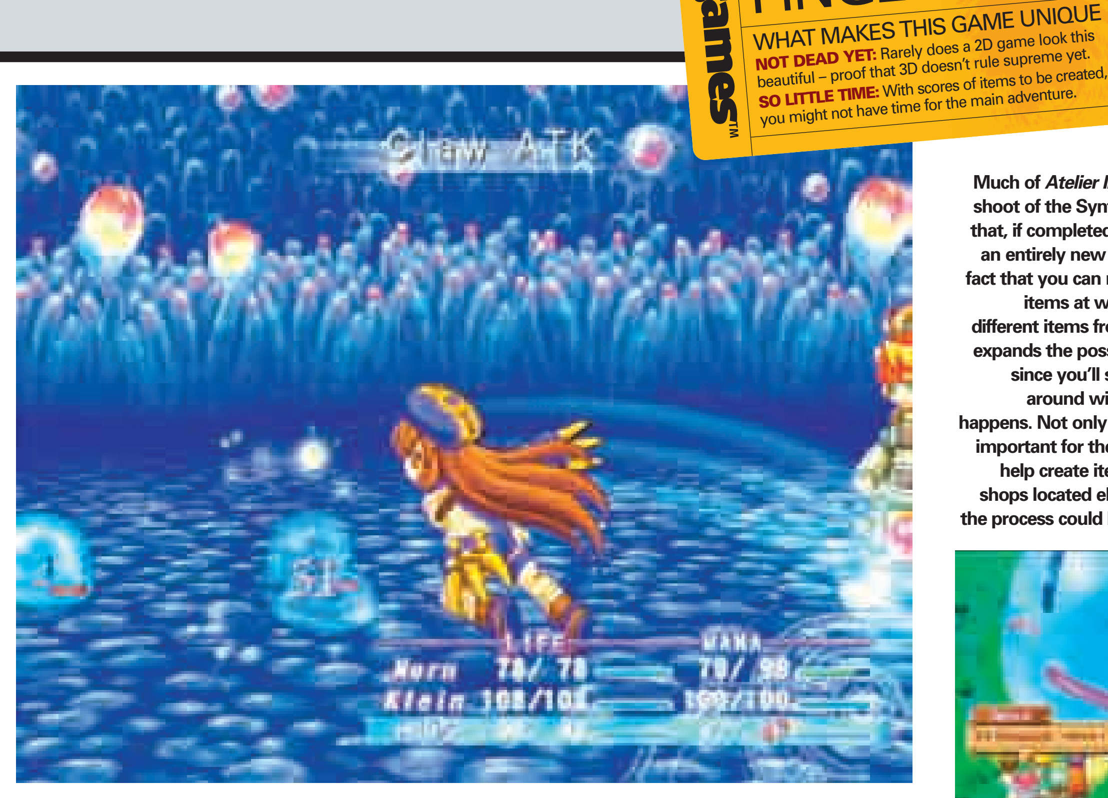
games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

NOT DEAD YET: Rarely does a 2D game look this beautiful – proof that 3D doesn't rule supreme yet.

SO LITTLE TIME: With scores of items to be created, you might not have time for the main adventure.



As you might have guessed, these jelly-like blobs are called Puni for a reason – don't expect them to put up much of a fight.

regard for you high, allowing them to succeed in item creation more often; a particularly loving Mana may even create additional items for free by way of gratitude, although the fact that you can only carry nine of any particular item means you'll be calling for their assistance on a regular basis.

While the art of alchemy isn't exactly difficult to master, the huge scope that it offers is where *Atelier Iris* really shines – there's so much to bear in mind and so many things to make, you can become so caught up in it that you'll lose track of the main adventure. Collecting elements plays a key role as you can't make anything without them, so you'll spend much of your time smashing up scenery with your enchanted rod as well as picking up or buying items that can then have elements extracted from them. With that done and your many Mana sated, you can start synthesising endless streams of mana items… so long as you've picked up an original to duplicate from in the first place. You haven't? Add another task to the list.



There's also the job of collecting coloured mana – that's with a small 'm' – that has to be crystalised to create mana crystals, which you then attach to your weapons to improve your abilities. Plus you have to visit as many shops as you can as often as possible in order to help expand the range of goods they can stock through an extensive mix of synthesis and trial-and-error. Oh, and you need to remember to check in with Lector the collector on a regular basis to update her on the items you've found, earning rewards along the way for completing sets of items. And there's the small matter of ensuring you return home every so often to revitalise one of your main characters, simply because a twist early on leaves her prone to death if you don't bother – don't forget that either.

It sounds like a lot to do – and it is, at least until you get used to juggling it all at once, but then that's just what *Atelier Iris* needed. A fanatical attention to the smaller things is exactly the kind of thing that all good RPGs are built upon (Nippon Ichi's home-grown material included) and while Gust's creation has its flaws, so do all but the purest of diamonds. With *Eternal Mana* it's just a matter of appreciating the many good points rather than focusing on the small number of negative ones that allows you to see the true gem inside

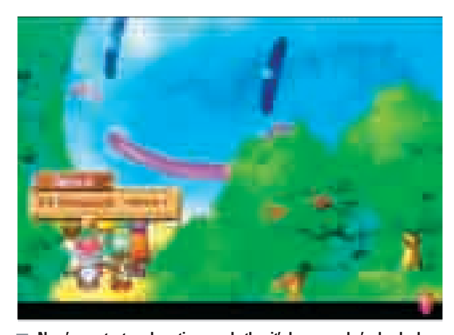


VERDICT 7/10

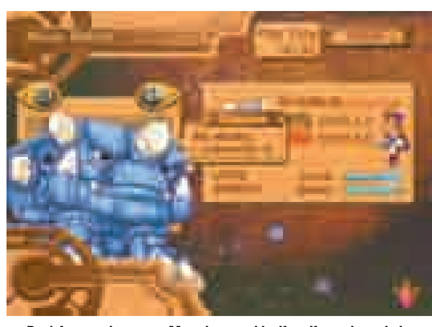
DELIGHTFULLY CHARMING – SIMPLE YET DEEP

MIX AND MATCH

Much of *Atelier Iris'* complexity comes from an off-shoot of the Synthesis option – shops offer recipes that, if completed with the right ingredients, create an entirely new item for you to buy. However, the fact that you can replace key ingredients with other items at will (and ultimately concoct entirely different items from what was originally intended), expands the possibilities exponentially, particularly since you'll spend much of your time messing around with new combinations to see what happens. Not only is getting the best possible recipe important for the shop's reputation, but it can also help create items used for even more recipes in shops located elsewhere. There's so many to find, the process could be turned into a game all by itself.



Norn's constant exclamations – whether it's because she's shocked, hungry or just plain tired – always bring a smile to the face.



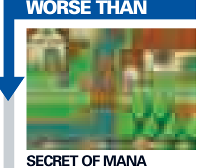
Don't forget to keep your Mana happy with gifts – if you abuse their skills without being appreciative, they won't co-operate.

SUIKODEN IV



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SECRET OF MANA

FAQs

Q. NIPPON ICHI AGAIN?
Only handling the publishing duties, but that doesn't make *Atelier Iris* less of a charming and beautiful game.

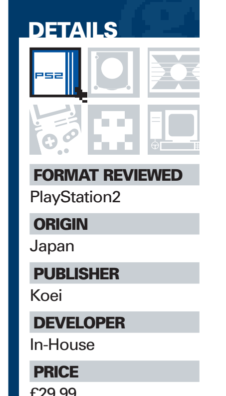
Q. TOO LINEAR?
Occasionally if you stick to the story, but the ability to mix things up with side-quests and item synthesis keeps things interesting.

Q. ANY FAULTS?
Only that some of the voice acting feels twee – the script's well written but hearing it sounds odd. Thankfully, the original Japanese voices are a replacement option.

WE'D USE "WHEN IN ROME" BUT WE'RE STILL NOT REALLY SURE WHAT IT MEANS

COLOSSEUM: ROAD TO FREEDOM

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Koei

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
9 September

PLAYERS
1-2

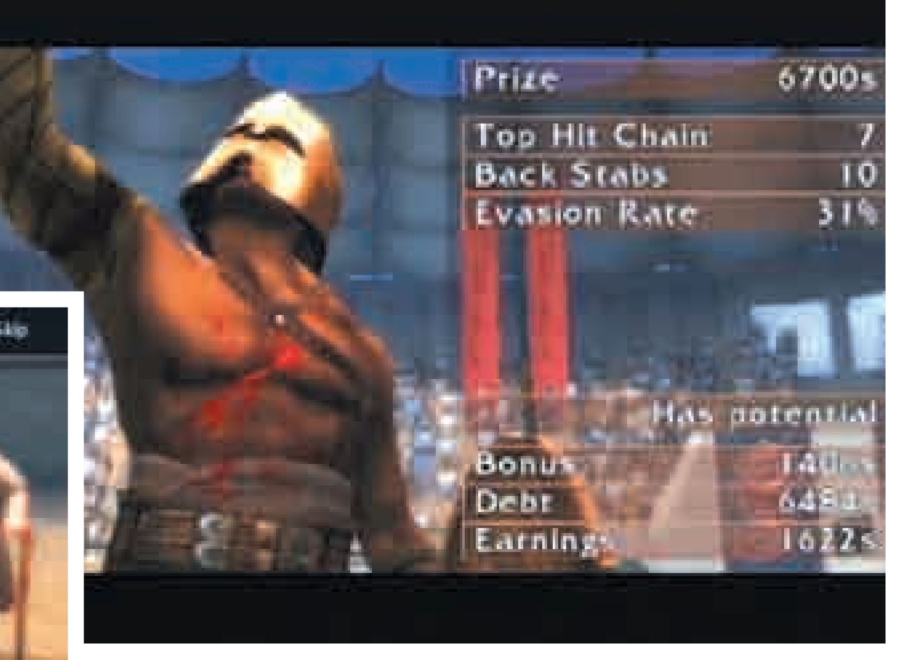
Everyone wants to be someone. Character creation is a stock ingredient of many games these days, but aside from a few EA and EyeToy innovations it's usually a case of simply choosing a face from a selection of three or four, making your character revoltingly obese or (if possible) lopsided and having done with it. Gladiatorial action RPG *Colosseum*'s method of choosing your warrior is decidedly different. Upon starting a new game you'll be put through a mini interview – you're asked for your previous occupation, origins and what gods you worship, among other things, and your fighter is generated based on your answers. We started off with a shady ex-criminal with a love of Mars, Roman god of war, and he was an unsurprisingly burly chap, but going by some of the possible answers, nimble little guys and average Joes are just as likely.

After that, however, initial impressions of *Colosseum* are hardly favourable. Combat seems clunky and unnatural at first and it isn't until you get to the training grounds that things start to make sense. Suddenly, the complexities and hidden depths of the fighting engine present themselves and the dark clouds begin to part. Parries can be slipped in mid-combo (as in *God Of War*), advanced combos and dodging moves spliced together to pummel your foes for no reply, and once you start getting the hang of it you'll be slaying hordes of enemies without taking a single scratch. Yeah, it takes some doing and you'll need the reactions and timing that are a staple of most fighting games, but it's worth putting the effort into taking your arena combat to the next level.

And while combat might start off fairly tame, it isn't long before wooden training swords are but a distant memory. Massive, elaborate blades hack chunks out of enemies, hefty cudgels smash bones and send foes reeling back in agony, and just about anything that finds its way into the arena can be used as a weapon. Even equipment can be removed and hurled at enemies (either out of desperation or just for fun) and tossing a discarded shield at an opponent and watching him stumble into a spinning blade is quite empowering. Your enemies are just as intimidating, charging into the arenas with all manner of weaponry (or in some cases, none at all) and are just as able to loot the spoils as you are – miss with a throw weapon and you can expect one of the cheeky blighters to be using it within seconds.

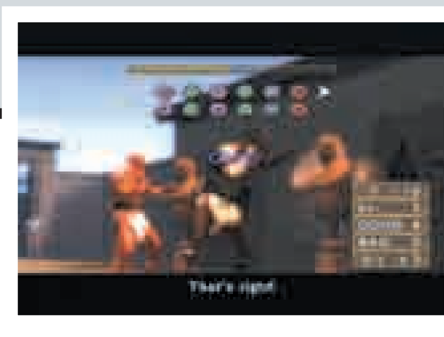


Dead tigers, blood everywhere – looks like you've won this one. Don't be too cocky though…



Better strikes earn you bonuses, although your level of debt can ultimately reduce the reward that any victory can offer.





FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

CLUBBED OUT: Pick a weapon and swing like crazy in the action-packed arena sections.

GIMME 50: Then enjoy the sort of training and progression usually seen in sport games or RPGs.

SKILL SHOT

As well as their equipment, foes occasionally have the grace to drop things called Skill Tablets. Assigned at designated points, these can offer new moves or stat upgrades to help in battle and can themselves be upgraded to make them more useful still. The only drawback is that these moves cost stamina – far more than regular attacks – so the chances of being mauled by a tiger while you catch your breath are that bit larger. Still, a few of these attacks, especially after they're powered up a little, will prove invaluable. The Turn skill, for instance, allows you to spin 180 degrees and recover a chunk of stamina in one fell swoop. Handy when there's more of them than there are you. Which is pretty much all the time…

It's hardly a fair fight when you're all dolled up in armour and the opponent only has shin pads.

Better yet is the way you can shape and evolve your gladiator as you rise through the ranks, earning the respect, attention and favour of Rome's key players. Strings of successful fights are rewarded with cash (much of which goes towards buying your freedom), equipment, skills and job offers, and as you climb to the top of your gladiatorial profession you'll be able to build up every aspect of your body. Training exercises can build up various body parts and skills as well as rewarding successful attempts with a greater return of nourishment, allowing you to build up stats and make offerings to the gods in the hope that you'll receive their favour the following day.

Everything about the presentation follows Koei's usual pattern of being fair – good in places, even – if never particularly dazzling. With hundreds of guys on the screen at once Koei's traditional *Dynasty Warriors* titles have an excuse for not looking their best, but with less action here it's hard not to want at least a little more from the game. Still, everything is functional and solid enough to keep you in the grip of the constant violence but it's the touches like the resulting wounds and bloodstains from each swing of a blade or the limb damage (a little like *Bushido Blade*) that really keep you playing. Indeed, attention to detail is excellent throughout and *Colosseum* does a great job of creating and maintaining a consistent game world.

Colosseum doesn't really have as much in common with Capcom's *Shadow Of Rome* as you might think – Koei's effort is based heavily around character progression while Capcom's is a more story-led piece. But the two games are of a similar quality all the same. Even though *Road To Freedom* lacks some of the polish of *Shadow Of Rome*, the clear focus (and lack of stealth nonsense) makes up for it and makes this as worthy of your attention as any similar title. It might be a little stat heavy for some and the repetition of events doesn't do it too many favours, but if you've got a thing for armoured men beating each other up there are few better places to get your fix than this.



VERDICT 7/10

A WELL-FOCUSED AND ENJOYABLE SLICE OF HISTORY

GLADIUS



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

SHADOW OF ROME

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY WEAPONS ARE THERE?

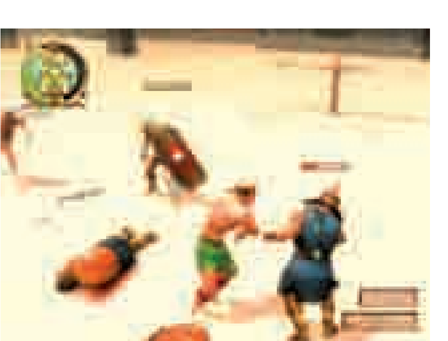
Hundreds. Seriously. There are plenty of variations of each type, some with extra bonuses to boot.

Q. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO PAY OFF MY DEBT?

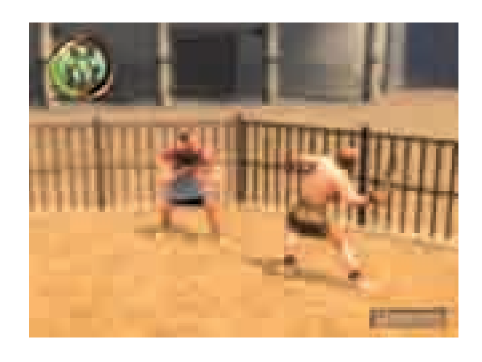
While it might seem like a lifetime at first, prize money quickly picks up. Still a fair while, though.

Q. WHAT THEN?

Even having paid for your freedom, you'll still be able to test yourself in the arena. Show 'em who's boss…

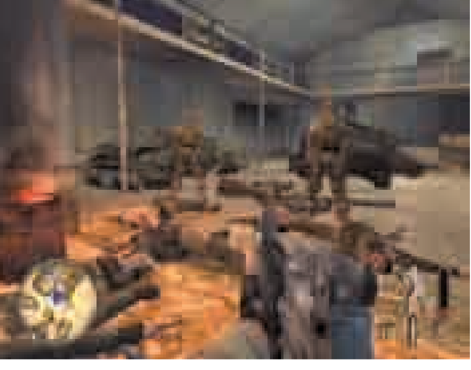




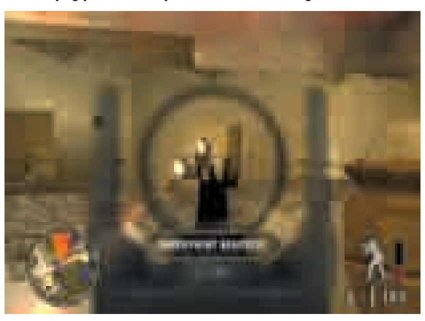




Helicopters and tanks will be at your disposal as you shoot your way through Somalia.



Look at all those bad guys. Another feather in the US war bonnet. Worryingly, it looks like your buddies are relieving themselves…



DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

DESERT WARFARE ON A GRANDER SCALE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Novalogic

DEVELOPER
Rebellion

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
30 September

PLAYERS
1-4 (1-32 online)

With many magazines, most games are reviewed in the easiest mode because the reviewer will want to see everything the title has to offer in the shortest space of time. However, on Easy mode it's hard to separate *Black Hawk Down* from the moral ambiguities of the real-life Delta Force troops' involvement in Somalia upon which the game is based. It's basically a duck shoot, as the untrained, badly organised enemy attack with all the uniformity of a team of catapult-carrying cub scouts. It's an important point to make, because in order to get any challenge or satisfaction from Rebellion's dustbowl shooter, it must be tackled on the hardest difficulty setting right away; only then will *Black Hawk Down* demonstrate any of the depth or well-implemented tactical elements it has to offer.

Basically a standard (but rudimentary) squad FPS with on-rails elements, *Delta Force* at least has a few tricks up its sleeve. Some weapons can shoot through wooden objects (door frames and so on) while there are plentiful sniping opportunities scattered throughout the immense Somali environments that would stretch beyond the draw distance of most PS2 war games twice over. It's a big step forward for PlayStation shooters in many ways; taking out what basically amounts to a clutch of pixels with an impulse shot has never been more rewarding. And even if the levels follow a simple waypoint marker system that makes the game seem more linear than it actually is, for the most part it's highly successful in achieving exactly what it sets out to do and features a well-designed level-up system that sees your hero progress from grunt to Special Forces, giving access to new weaponry and skills.

However, there are gripes. Though the helicopter-set portions of the game are exhilarating, the truck-based on-rails sections fail to spark with the immediacy of war. *Black Hawk Down* makes an initial misstep by beginning the game with a lengthy truck ride into town that manages to suck out any anticipation for the game. The team-based elements are also slightly ineffectual at times, because while the team has strong enough AI to cope on its own there are few moments where its usage becomes imperative. It's a slightly hit-and-miss affair then, but when it works it's entertaining and worth recommending to a point.

FINGERPRINT

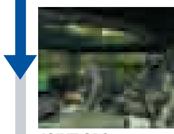
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

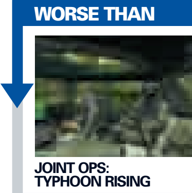
TEAM AWESOME: Unlike *Brothers In Arms*, your troops can function without your constant nannying.
SPLINTERS: Bullets go through wood – great for when you see an enemy dive behind a door jamb.

VERDICT 6/10
A SATISFYING SHOOTER, BEST PLAYED IN HARD MODE

BLACK HAWK DOWN [MOVIE]
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN





JOINT OPS: TYPHOON RISING


eMag

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

LEVEL UP: Enhanced multiplayer, story-specific day/night cycles and a mission/cut-scene editor. Nice.

LEVEL DOWN: Airstrikes are lame. Bombers arriving in seconds and making right-angle turns? Eh?

'ACCESSIBLE RTS' – A KEVLAR-COATED OXYMORON?

CODENAME: PANZERS – PHASE TWO

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Hungary

PUBLISHER
CDV

DEVELOPER
Stormregion

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium 4 1.3 GHz, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb graphics card, 3Gb HDD space

Let's get it out of the way: yes, RoboCop is in the game. There, we said it. You see, *Panzers* prides itself on being an epic, movie-like experience and, as such, Peter Weller and a bunch of Hollywood writers have been drafted in to add weight to proceedings. Sadly, while Weller's presence is definitely a positive one, the rest of the 'acting' is a hit-and-miss hodgepodge of mockney and *'Allo 'Allo* that, unfortunately, betrays the dramatic tone being sought.

Though it perpetuates the recent shift towards more accessible RTS titles, *Phase Two* (like its predecessor) isn't blisteringly original. Indeed, the less resource management-driven approach that favours immediacy over economics may even be regarded as dumbing down by RTS die-hards. But that's not entirely true, and these strategy nuts aren't necessarily the audience at whom *Panzers* is aimed. Truth be told, *Phase Two* boasts as much number-crunching minutiae as the most anal RTS romp; the difference is that here it exists beneath the surface. Newcomers to this intimidating breed of war-'em-up will be perfectly capable in combat using just the gauges and targeting reticles, while armchair generals will know exactly what range and armament differentials exist between the M3-40 and the M3 Grant/Lee, and be able to exploit them accordingly. But while they're obviously beneficial, implicit military knowledge and second-nature RTS instincts are not requisites here.

The hybrid RTS dynamic is a far cry from the entrenched 'harvest credits/build structures/ harvest more credits/build units' methodology and a million miles from the production line, disposable-soldier mentality. It's no coincidence that *Panzers* is a story- and character-driven experience, and no accident that RoboWeller is on



board. Shaky accents aside, players invest in and begin to care for characters under their command – which is crucial, as ensuring their survival is key. While short-term success is possible by Kamikaze-ing your squads until the enemy is obliterated, your units earn XP the longer they live and the more they fight, so there's far greater merit in bringing them home alive. Far from dumbing down the precocious RTS genre, *Panzers*' accessibility in some respects deepens the experience.

With a revamped and rock-solid multiplayer, full-blown mission editor and even slicker visuals and presentation, *Phase Two* improves on the original in every way. It's still not a full-blown hero, but it certainly deserves a medal for bravery at the very least.

VERDICT 7/10

GAMES DON'T MAKE WAR GREAT… WAIT, YES THEY DO

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BLITZKRIEG: ROLLING THUNDER



There's the occasional moment of sprawling spectacle in *Panzers*.



Darkness – hardly an advantage when you're in a noisy tank, is it?



Aerial support is laughable – the planes are all over the shop.

games™

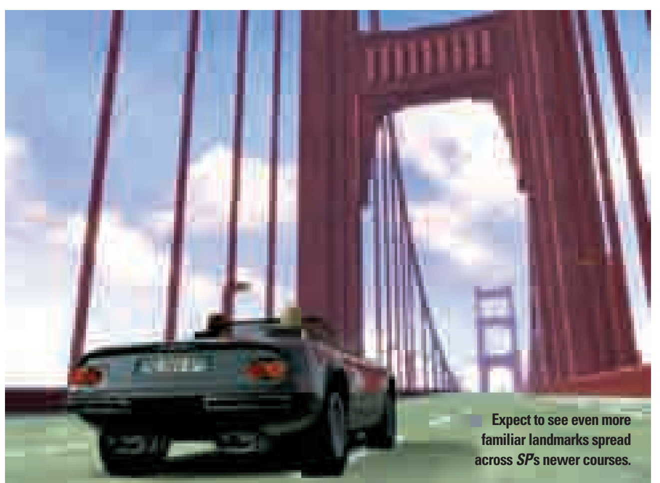
FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

WHOA!: The beautiful scenery will have jaws hitting the floor at every bend.

DRIFT!: *Out Run 2*'s drift remains one of videogame racing's most pleasurable mechanics.





Expect to see even more familiar landmarks spread across *SP*'s newer courses.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Sega AM2

PRICE
£1 per play

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

OUT RUN 2 SP

THE BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY THAT JUST KEEPS ON GIVING

The first thing *Out Run 2* enthusiasts will notice about Sega's *SP* edition of the 'beautiful journey' is the gorgeous new cabinet. Modelled on the rear end of a Ferrari 360, in classic yellow, the machine stands out in the arcade like a Testarossa in a multi-storey car park. It's a dream to use as well, with impeccably designed steering and pedals, complete with a stereo speaker set-up that surrounds your head. Fantastic. But there are a few more tricks under *SP*'s bonnet than just a snazzy new cabinet.

Graphically, *SP* eclipses its predecessor in every department – quite some feat, given *Out Run 2*'s looks. Car models are noticeably sharper and shinier, while the backgrounds that speed by at 150kmh positively ache with a beauty usually reserved for the Tate. Stunning is quite simply not the word; this is true artistry, and as integral to the gameplay as the still wonderful drift mechanic. Racing in *Out Run 2 SP* is as delightful as ever; the wonderful mix of cruising and insane drift is still an enthralling ride. *Burnout 3* may have the market nailed when it comes to traffic-weaving, high-speed racing but *Out Run 2* sits neatly next to it, backed up by its ethos of serenity and joy.

It's not that different from *Out Run 2* but the visuals are far clearer.

Driving alone in *Out Run 2* still pales into comparison with the two-player battles; although *SP* includes a 'rival' system, giving the player a tangible opponent on the course, it can't match the excitement of racing against a real-world driver. AM2's 'rubber band' catch-up logic is superbly designed, meaning each race is furiously contested until the final corner, making for an intensely enjoyable experience. But the crucial difference between *SP* and its forefather is the inclusion of a brand new course, effectively doubling the amount of track available to racers. Brilliantly, this new course can be integrated into the original, making each fork in the road lead to a potentially new area. This will no doubt please *Out Run* aficionados who have grown weary of seeing the same scenery on every drive.

Some may argue that, despite *SP*'s beauty, the game itself is too limited to compete for attention with the likes of console racers such as *Burnout 3*. They are missing the point. *Out Run 2* is the pinnacle of the arcade experience – an adrenaline rush lasting little over five minutes but that's utterly engrossing from beginning to end. Pitching a perfect drift around the final hairpin, sliding past your opponent's Ferrari at 100kmh while soaking up the gorgeous imagery before accelerating to the finish line and first place. Worth a pound? We think so.



VERDICT 8/10

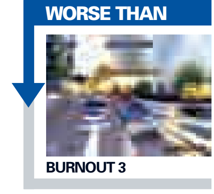
A SUBLIME SPECIAL EDITION OF A GREAT GAME

OUT RUN 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BURNOUT 3





Executing a perfect Mind's Eye move makes the screen go all black and white and iconic. Ooh, classy.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SCEJ

DEVELOPER
Game Republic

PRICE
¥7,140

RELEASE
November '05
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

THE GEISHA OF GAMES – BEAUTIFUL, PLEASURABLE AND SOMEWHAT EMPTY

GENJI: DAWN OF THE SAMURAI

Movies such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *House Of Flying Daggers* have made the hyper-romantic aesthetic very popular lately. Beautifully crafted, they are the epitome of style over content; the textual version of Emo music, catering to the lowest common denominator who love profound imagery but whose emotional waters only have a shallow end. The first title to emerge from Yoshiki Okamoto's Game Republic studio, *Genji* is a fine videogame example of the genre.

Set around 1129AD, *Genji* presents a developing Japan as a fantastical and fascinating place. As you might expect, a snowfall of blossom falls from every tree, while the green of each foliage-heavy locale is greener than the finest jade. Taking in day, night, summer, autumn and winter, the screenshots do not lie; it is simply an astonishing game to look at, aided by a fixed camera and rounded off with a huge number of effectively emotive yet ham-fistedly, desperately cinematic cut-scenes.

Ignoring exactly how much Sony's hack-and-slasher actually follows its ancient source text – see this month's Kongetsu for the full rant – *Genji* is an inoffensive tale of rebellion and victory against massive odds. In time-honoured videogame tradition, two heroes – one small and quick, the other huge, slow and hulking (think *Final Fight* with historical outfits and without Cody) – must battle their way through an ever-respawning army of adversaries in order to restore the Genji dynasty to its rightful position of power.

Yoshitsune (the smaller of the two) is a dual-wielding samurai, while warrior monk Benkei – an early boss who joins the charge against evil warlord Kiyomori – begins the game swinging a metal-ended telegraph pole. Being sprightly, Yoshitsune can jump longer distances and climb, enabling him to explore rooftops and, say, an island in a stream. Benkei, being a giant of a man, can smash open doors, ring metal bells with his oversized weapons and bash down trees to create a bridge. Both men also come equipped with a 'Mind's Eye' power that slows down time and enables one-hit kills with an accurately timed tap of the Square button. And from beginning to end, action continues in this vein, like the bastard gene-splicing union of *Onimusha*, *Dynasty Warriors* and *Devil May Cry* (only much, much prettier than any of its three parents).

If this reads like something of a tick-box shopping list of game elements then you'll

Yoshitsune can collect the items hidden up high, whereas anything hidden behind something big belongs to Benkei.



FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

ANI-MAYBE: Cut-scenes are a highly filmic experience, in stark contrast to the gameplay bits.
SHOW-OFF: Combat fits into the linear gameplay, despite being an intuitive, two-button discipline.

EYE CAN SEE YOU

The Mind's Eye attack is a huge interruption of the graceful battle system implemented in *Genji*, but when pulled off effectively it's an incredibly satisfying addition to the combat. A flick of a shoulder button brings on Kamui mode, with a slowing of the world and a bluish glare on the screen signalling the transition. Enemies will then move away from you (often in a prescribed battle formation), with an on-screen icon signalling when they are about to attack. A well-timed flick of the Square button will kill the enemy outright, and the skill can be chained to clear the screen of bad guys. However, to use this talent on some bosses is almost impossible, as their icon prompts appear for about one hundredth of a second before your energy bar is reduced by half.


Beautiful, isn't it? A perfect venue for a samurai showdown if ever we saw one.

already have a fair idea of how it feels to play. Yet *Genji* isn't the carbon copy of *Onimusha* or Dante's adventures that many commentators have suggested it might be. The excellent combat is less button-tap-combo-heavy than it is reliant on a keen sense of timing, while enemies drop from the sky rather than spawning in a bubble of light. *Genji* also dispenses with Capcom's patented brand of 'insert object-shaped object into object-shaped object hole' puzzles, resulting in a narrative-focused experience that's linear to the point where the next objective is signalled on the map with an oversized exclamation mark.

Genji's saving grace for many gamers – especially those who like to replay their games – may well be its character development system, which features new weapons, armour and items for both characters. However, as the shiny new things are either taken from conspicuously positioned boxes on each level or bought with gold pilfered from cadavers (or found in vases), the inherent joy is to be found entirely in wielding them rather than earning them. Additionally, Chick Stones hidden throughout each locale can be slotted into three-way level-up brackets to improve prowess, but these invisibles – signalled by a DualShock rumble and a flashing orb on each character model – often prove so frustrating to unearth that it interrupts the fluency of the game's enthralling narrative and the urgency of the mission at hand.

Maybe it's the question of expectations that forces us to answer with a slightly stifled yawn. Okamoto's previous landmarks – *Street Fighter II*, *Devil May Cry* and the mighty, genre-spawning *Resident Evil* – have all stayed at the top of their respective gaming tree long after their tired imitators have withered and dropped from the lower branches. Yet there is nothing about *Genji* that strikes the player with the immediacy of those three stalwarts, as it seems content to re-tread worn ground without ever pausing to innovate along the way. Not to mention its relatively short lifespan, with the protracted cut-scenes bolstering out play time to somewhere around the six-hour mark. As a result Game Republic's opening gambit is left feeling plod-through tired before the credits have run despite its undeniable visual magnificence.

VERDICT 6/10
THE 12TH CENTURY EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

KILL BILL VOLUME 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



KILL BILL VOLUME 1

FAQs

Q. SO, WHAT'S NEW?
Not as much as you might expect. *Genji* follows an old-as-time gaming path.

Q. BUT IT'S NOT ALL BAD?
Not by any means. It's as beautiful as any swordfight movie with the words 'Quentin' and 'Tarantino' slapped on the packaging.

Q. BUT ARE THERE MONSTERS?
Yes, several of them. But nothing that hasn't been done just as well in other games since about 1988.



"IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR VORSPRUNG DURCH TECHNIK, YOU KNOW…"

TECHNIC BEAT

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Mastiff

DEVELOPER
Arika

PRICE
$19.99

RELEASE
TBC (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

Music games are totally awesome. Few other genres can boast the originality and diversity of the rhythm action genre – one minute you're remixing Herbie Hancock's *Rockit*, the next stepping into the shoes of a guitar-wielding superhero and taking on a jazz trumpet player dressed as a bee. Then before you know it, you're off your ass and busting all kinds of crazy shapes on a dance mat, trying to keep up with a geyser of arrows that are hell-bent on making you sweat buckets (not literally, of course – that would really hurt). With so many other bizarre goings-on to be found in this field of gaming, *Technic Beat*'s giant teddies, wonky woollen creatures and plinky-plonky ditties really don't seem so out of the ordinary after all…

At the most basic level, *Technic Beat*'s action is as simple as most of the rhythm action stable. Circles appear on the dancefloor with smaller circles growing out from the centre – it's a simple case of moving your character into the ring and tapping the Square button as the inner ring hits the outer one. If two or more of these rings happen to overlap you can set off complex chains, and by using your character's special move (which involves moving rings around in some way or another) you can plan big strings of your own. Mix in a few other advanced tactics and a lot of practice (later songs are hard but the ring patterns themselves aren't too tricky to learn) and you've got the fundamentals of this game.

Confused? That's hardly surprising. Even after a few tries it can be tough to wrap your brain around the psychedelic light show that is *Technic Beat*. But like with many games of its ilk, pattern recognition is key to success. As anyone who has attempted the crazier tunes that *Dance Dance Revolution* has to offer will tell you, it's often about recognising familiar step patterns in the intimidating and fast-flowing stream of arrows and it's the same deal here. Once your eyes adjust and you start seeing the chain possibilities (and, indeed, necessities), you'll wonder how you ever found those four- and five-star songs (out of a possible eight stars) so difficult. But even with these new-found skills, anything harder is going to take a hell of a lot of practice and patience as well as superhuman reflexes to get through.

But as music game fans well know, a rhythm-action title can be made or broken by its track listing. *Technic Beat*'s is a ridiculously mixed bag and for every couple of terrific blippy tunes there's a near nonsensical anti-song that makes Atari Teenage Riot seem melodic and structured by comparison. Some of the best tracks come from

Despite the range of different characters on offer, only a few are any fun to use.



It might look simple but soon enough your eyes will be bulging from all the neon.





FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

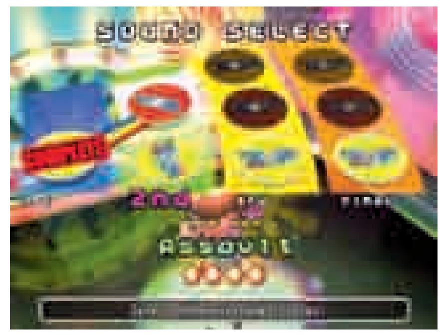
END OF A CENTURY: The rhythm-action joys of *Beatmania* and *Dancing Stage*…

ENTERTAIN ME: …Spliced with the frantic running around of most party games.



"ALL THE PEOPLE…"

Although *Technic Beat* offers a choice of six characters, it's tricky to see exactly why anyone would want to play as all but a couple of them. While 'basic' character Knitty has the ability to carry rings around, others do far less useful things (like sliding or kicking them around), and some of the other abilities (like Bot's rings rapidly shrinking away as he carries them) make pretty much everyone bar Rain and Knitty a wasted choice. Unless, of course, you're looking to challenge yourself beyond the norm, but judging by the insane difficulty of the later tunes, that really won't be necessary…



Choosing different 'routes' through the track list creates a bit of variety.



the Namco back catalogue – remixes and re-imaginations of the themes to 30-odd retro classics occupy the game disc, spanning everything from *Dig Dug* to *Splatterhouse* via delights such as *Ridge Racer*, *Mappy*, *PacMania* and the horribly infectious *Toy Pop*, our new favourite song. That's not to say the in-house tunes are bad – a few absolute stinkers aside, most are forgettable at worst while some are genuinely awesome. With over 80 songs in total there's plenty of choice, and since they're all pretty concise you'll quickly work out which ones you like and which you'll only ever play once.

From the off, Arika's latest is obviously a budget title. It lacks the production values of something like *Amplitude*, the licensed tunes that find their way into (and often contaminate) the *Dancing Stage* series, and the general polish of the market's other top music titles such as *Gitaroo Man* or *Parappa The Rapper*. But if there's one thing this game has in spades, it's charm. Characters, backdrops and even some of the tunes are almost enough to make you vomit flowers (in a good way) and you'll often find yourself working through Arcade mode several times more than you intended to just because of how entertaining a dancing platypus in snorkelling gear can be.

As an introduction to the genre, *Technic Beat* probably wouldn't be an ideal place to begin. Its progression is as basic as can be (three two-minute tunes in succession à la *Dancing Stage*), its gameplay potentially mind-ruining for inexperienced rhythm-actioners, and its song list seemingly unappealing to the untrained eye. But to anyone who knows their Kitty Ns from their Knittys, *Technic Beat* is a simplistic delight that constantly surprises with quality and entertainment far beyond what its budget price would suggest. There's no modding, no bullet time, no celebrity endorsement and no overblown special effects – just a great little music game that, for less than $20, is a genuine bargain



VERDICT 7/10
AN ORIGINAL AND ENTERTAINING BUDGET TITLE

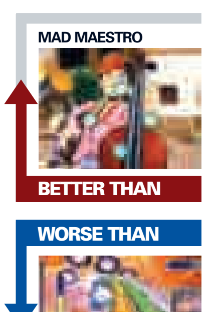
FAQs

Q. HOW MANY SONGS?
A whopping 84 tracks, spanning everything from old Namco tunes to 'banging' house tracks. No licensed music, though.

Q. HOW DOES IT WORK?
Technic Beat is closer to *Beatmania* than anything else, both in terms of structure and putting the music together.

Q. BEST CHARACTER?
Rain, the strange little girl – her special ability renders most of the other characters pretty much redundant.

MAD MAESTRO

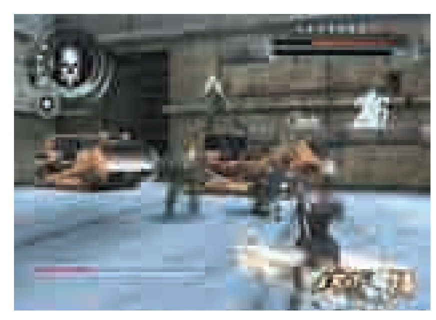


BETTER THAN

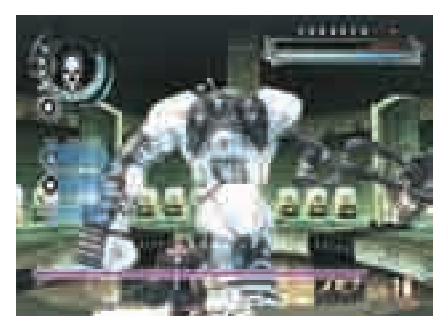
WORSE THAN



AMPLITUDE



Dead man versus bulldozers – a showdown that's kept bookies in business for decades.



Take the phone off the hook – this boss takes bloody ages to beat.



We suppose it's quite easy to look this tough when you're already dead.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

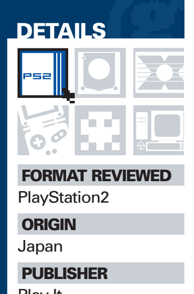
THREE OF A KIND: Unlocking two new playable characters provides plenty of variation.

WHO?: Adding a character called Rocketbilly Redcadilliac has to be an improvement.

YOU CAN HAVE TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

GUNGRAVE: OVERDOSE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Play It

DEVELOPER
RED Entertainment

PRICE
£19.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

When it's done right, there's nothing more satisfying than a high-action adventure game. The genre has now evolved to a point where far more than rapid button-bashing is in order if you want to succeed. Awe-inspiring combos and style are what these games are now about and we were looking forward to another chance to vent our aggression on rendered persons in *Gungrave: Overload.*

Although insanely short, the first *Gungrave* was an impressive game and certainly a more than adequate foundation for this sequel. Also, with noted anime artists Yasuhiro Nightow and Kosuke Fujishima drafted in to work on *Overdose*'s character design, and a moody soundtrack composed by Tsuneo Imahori, this game had enough potential to be one of the sleeper hits of the year. Sadly, that's not going to happen. On the plus side, *Overdose* delivers what you'd expect. As was the case with the first title, it's truly manic: facing off against over 20 enemies – all toting rocket launchers – armed only with your two guns and the coffin you were buried in is suitably hectic and succeeds in giving a fair action fix.

In fact, it all works so well that this madness would be perfectly manageable if it wasn't for the sub-standard camera. Trying to keep track of what's going on in an epic brawl is made extremely difficult thanks to the uncontrollable flitting. As a result, you soon find yourself losing all co-ordination and dropping the tactical and stylish approach of dealing with enemies in favour of just hammering away on a single button until they're all dead. In a way, had RED not insisted on cramming in so much action the game would have been much more playable.

Making this situation worse is the poor lock-on that the game features. Although it seems minor, it's an element that can destroy gameplay if not implemented correctly. Here, your lock on a foe will only be maintained while he's in your line of sight, and with the camera skipping around in most combat situations this is never the case for long. These factors aren't only irritating but give the game a difficulty level that will see less persistent gamers just giving up. It's a shame, as without these annoyances *Gungrave: Overdose* could have rivalled the leading titles in this genre, but as it stands it really can't compare to the likes of *Devil May Cry 3* and *Ninja Gaiden*.



VERDICT 6/10
A LITTLE TOO UNPREDICTABLE

GUNGRAVE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



DEVIL MAY CRY 3


eMag

YS: THE ARK OF NAPISHTIM

IT'S PRONOUNCED 'EECE' – LIKE GREECE, OR FLEECE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
PC, PSP

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
Falcom

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
9 September (Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Levelling up – a staple of the RPG genre. The act of continually fighting enemies in order to gain experience. It's an archaic mechanic that still plagues 99 per cent of the genre, and possibly the worst example of this gameplay limitation comes in the form of Falcom's action RPG *Ys: Ark Of Napishtim*. This is the sixth title in the *Ys* series, which began life on the Master System, and not a lot has changed. The game is, to all intents and purposes, two-dimensional; though the landscape and characters are carved from polygonal wood, gameplay occurs on a flat, eight-directional plane, and the dull, poorly detailed textures give the game a look that wouldn't have been out of place a decade ago. Play consists of little more than NPC chit chat, running through pitifully signposted scenery and hammering the attack and jump buttons as a never-ending barrage of enemies assault the hero. Some may find this fun – a blast back to the old school. We, however, do not.

Progression in *Ys* is entirely determined by the experience level of your hero, Adol. Players who move through the game without making regular pitstops to level up will fall foul of incredibly powerful and invincible enemies within minutes. Instead, success can only be obtained by repeatedly revisiting enemy-filled screens and engaging in 'combat' to gain experience. Surely a game that requires a character to do this should have this happen smoothly, as a natural progression. In *Ys*, this mechanic kicks in from the beginning, and to the uninitiated, confrontations with invincible enemies are impassable. At no point is the player told to level up – it is assumed by the game, a clear indication that *Ys* is designed for the hardcore RPG fan and no-one else.

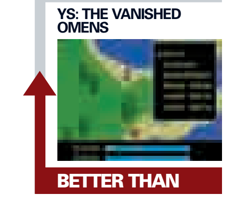


Clichéd RPG characters? Here? Surely not.

But will it even appeal to RPG nuts? Even the most ardent RPG lover surely can't look past the game's ridiculous attempt at combat. The 'old school' excuse is not acceptable. Running around slashing wildly at enemies while jumping around like a nightmare in the Mushroom Kingdom is appallingly dated. What's worse is that the shield on the hero's arm can't be used. To add insult to injury, *Ys* is obscenely difficult, with the 'game over' screen making more TV appearances than the Crazy Frog. This is clichéd, tedious, frustrating nonsense, as archaic in its gameplay as it is banal in its story. A serious 'level down' for Konami and Falcom. Avoid.



YS: THE VANISHED OMENS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

LEGEND OF ZELDA: MINISH CAP

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

HACK: *Ys* has a genuine 8-bit feel. Great for retro fans, lame for everyone else.

SLASH: Combat is worse than all other games. And we mean *all* other games.





This monster is going to kill you many, many times. Enjoy.


eMag



Gojiro is more than happy with his new hat.



Your guns are no match for my attack button hammering.



The Godspeed screen. Like a rubbish iPod advert.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Acquire

DEVELOPER
505 Game Street

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

SAMURAI WESTERN

LIKE YOJIMBO MIXED WITH A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS… ONLY RUBBISH

It's such a shame – *Samurai Western* starts so well. Everyone knows samurai are, in general, very cool. *Red Dead Revolver* proved that a respectful pastiche of the Wild West makes for a vibrant videogame setting. Surely mixing the two couldn't fail? *Samurai Western* proves it could, but, at first, it all seems so different…

The game's hackneyed but enjoyable plot begins with a mysterious samurai named Gojiro strolling into a very typical Wild West town, before he's confronted by a group of moustachioed hoodlums. The scene is pitched perfectly. Dust clouds swirl at the combatants' feet while a scorching sun burns the earth. The music is a triumphant electro remix of a long lost Ennio Morricone masterpiece – think *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly* covered by Royksopp. Quick as a flash, the 'bad guys' fire off a full chamber each, only for our samurai to deflect every single shot with his glimmering sword, all without the need for bullet time or a panning camera. Fantastic.



Then the game begins, and for the first half an hour it's a fun romp. Dodging and deflecting gunfire, pirouetting through groups of enemies and dealing the kind of uber-cool death only a samurai can. The copious litres of blood that spurt and spray from the wounds of the fallen are wonderfully offset by the split-second stoppages of your warrior in full pose. Even better is *Samurai Western*'s equivalent of Dante's Devil Trigger, named Godspeed mode, that sends Gojiro into a whirlwind of fury, butchering all who cross his path with a single slash of his blade. This is *Samurai Western*'s best feature, and the growl of vibration the DualShock emits every time a cowboy is sliced in half is tremendously satisfying.

Unfortunately, the brief flirtation with joy that is Godspeed mode is not enough to save *Samurai Western* from sub-mediocrity. Gameplay boils down to little more than a perpetual hammering of 'slash' with a rhythmic interlude of 'dodge'. In theory, the dodge feature sounds excellent. Standing still allows Gojiro to deflect knives and bullets with his sword, sometimes sending them back whence they came. Moving and pressing dodge causes your warrior to spin. Constantly. Bullet deflecting is made redundant by its static nature, so players will find themselves spinning though the patchily textured environments like a crazed dreidl, only stopping to deliver a slashing to whoever may be nearest. After an hour or so, *Samurai Western* starts to unravel the very fabric of your brain. Nowhere is it written that tearing through a constantly respawning group of enemies for upward of 15 minutes – within one room – is fun. And it's not. It's miserable, frustrating and boring. Mercifully, the camera is so distracting and dizzying that most of the hideous action doesn't have to be seen.

FAQs

Q. SAMURAIS AND COWBOYS, EH?
Yeah, sounds fantastic doesn't it? In theory, it is…

Q. WILL IT MAKE MY MIND HURT?
Yes. Yes it will. It could also give you cancer of the soul.

Q. IS IT BETTER THAN ONIMUSHA?
Don't be stupid. Leave us alone.



■ Gojiro can pick up downed enemies with the palm of his hand. Clever boy.

FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SAMURAI NOON: No other game puts you in control of a samurai in the Wild West.

SPINDASH: *Samurai Western* contains more pirouettes than a Torvill and Dean routine.

HATMAN BEGINS

By far the most enjoyable element of *Samurai Western* is the ability to customise your warrior's look. All manner of hats, lassos and assorted cowboy paraphernalia are accessible as unlockable extras, and the detail that has gone into this frivolous aspect of the game is astonishing. Hats can be rescaled, rotated and repositioned to the nearest pixel, to give your samurai that perfect look. Not that it's going to matter, as he'll be too busy spinning around for anyone to see how cool he looks. Brilliantly, it's actually possible to completely cover Gojiro in hats and play with a glitchy new superhero for a glitchy new era. Awesome.

Considering *Samurai Western* comes from the minds of those who crafted the original *Tenchu* and the unique, if flawed, *Way Of The Samurai*, it's surprising that their new title is such a one trick pony. Not a good trick, either. *Tenchu* had a strong and well-realised stealth mechanic, and *Way Of The Samurai* allowed the player to craft their own adventure within the game space. *Samurai Western* has more in common with *Dynasty Warriors* than either of those titles. It's a *Dynasty Warriors* without scope. Or fun. Or sensible AI (enemies constantly turn their backs – cue a sword through the spine).

Without a branching storyline or a varied gameplay mechanic, the game has little to offer in an overcrowded market. The initial joy of slashing cowboys quickly peters out, leaving the player yearning for a *Red Dead Revolver* or an *Onimusha*. Some may argue that the RPG elements lift this above standard slasher fare, but the levelling up is done at an almost entirely constant rate, meaning the samurai power to enemy power ratio (if there is such a thing) never fluctuates. In fact, some of the most fun to be had in *Samurai Western* comes in customising the look of your character (see 'Hatman Begins') – not exactly the essence of the game.

Samurai Western is a mess of a game, one that dangles a fun-looking carrot in front of your nose before bludgeoning your face in with a mallet. With the likes of *Onimusha 4* and *Genji* on the horizon, only samurai fanatics would be insane enough to spend money on this. Then they would immediately commit hara-kiri for bringing shame to their villages.

VERDICT 3/10

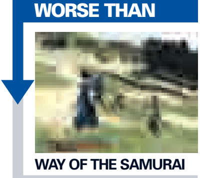
DOUR, TURGID AND PAINFUL – LEAVE WELL ALONE

SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX

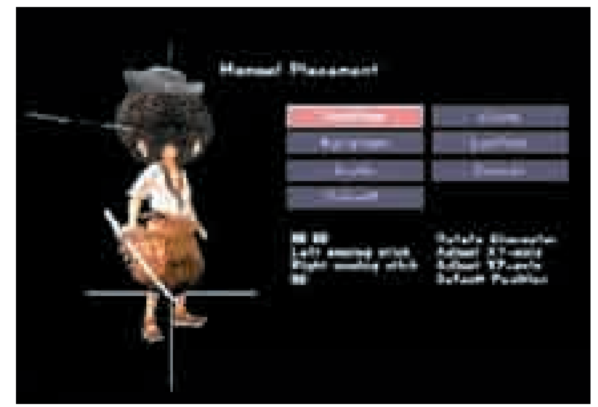


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

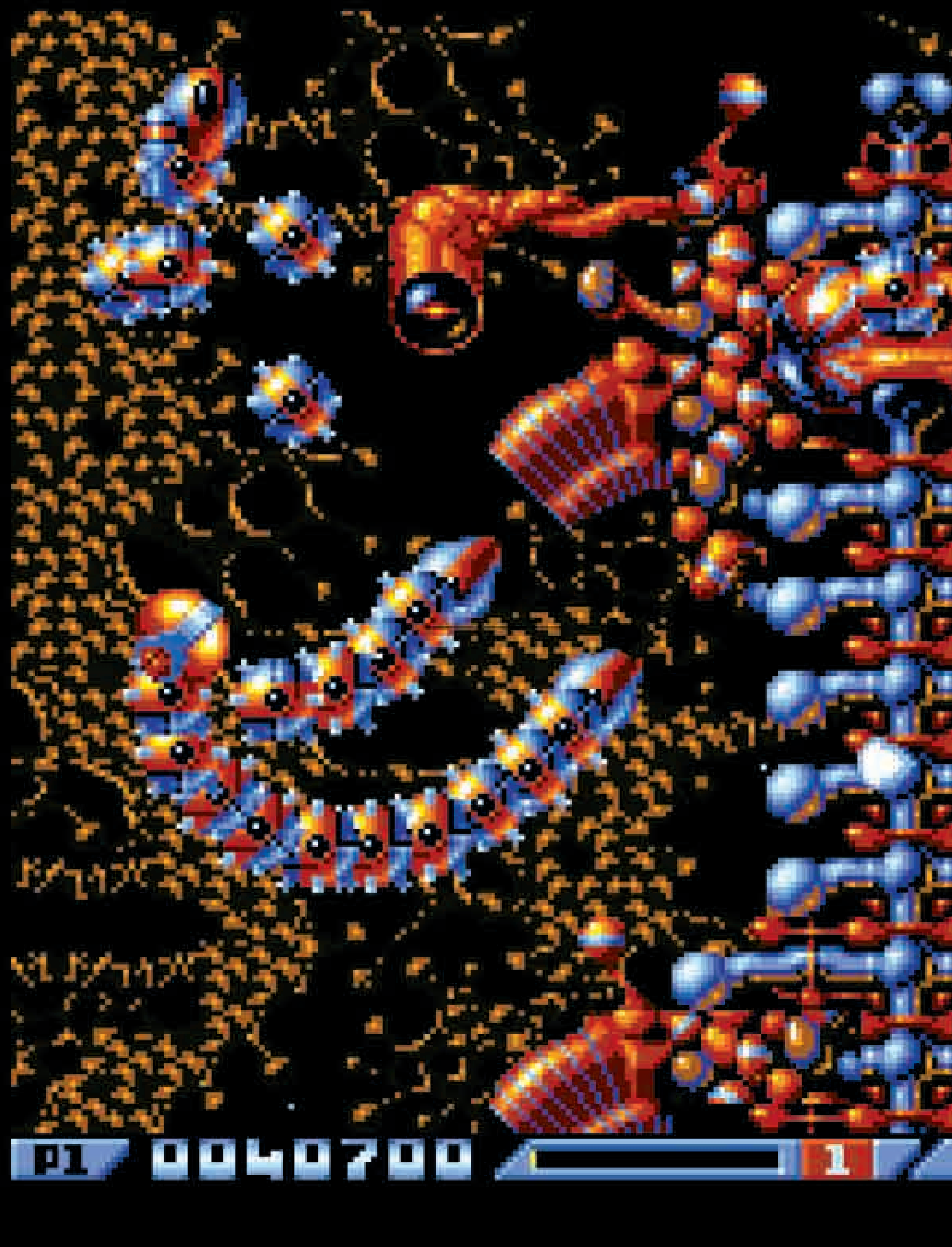


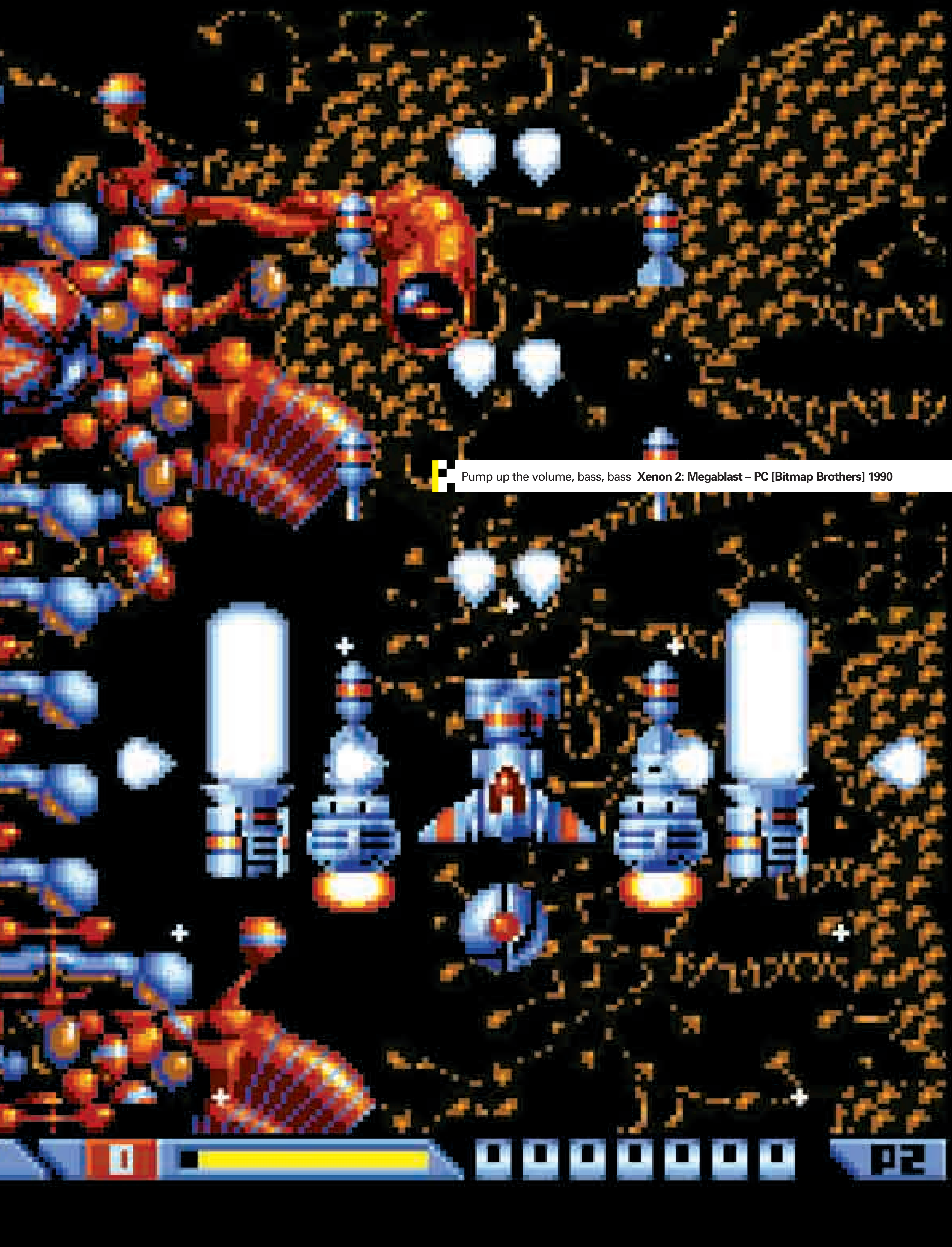
WAY OF THE SAMURAI





■ The scene is set nicely. Just a shame the gameplay isn't…


P1
0040700
1



Pump up the volume, bass, bass **Xenon 2: Megablast – PC [Bitmap Brothers] 1990**


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.35 AUG 2005
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
RAFFAELE CECCO – EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!
HARDWARE LEGEND – AMIGA 500
BEN DAGLISH
A PRIVATE CHAT WITH THE C64 MUSIC MAESTRO
SPACE HARRIER
PREDATOR
GOOD FILM, BAD GAME
GREAT GAMING MOMENT
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT, BUYERS' GUIDE, RETRO CONTACT, GREAT GAMING BOSSES AND MORE…

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

As you're reading this issue I'll be making final preparations for this year's Classic Gaming Expo. My poor little car will be stuffed beyond breaking point with all manner of retro machines, the stereo will be cranked up to 11 and I'll be free of the wife and kids for a whole weekend. It's certainly going to be a great trip…

If this year's CGEUK proves anything it's that retro gaming is continuing to gather momentum, and judging by the amount of people expected to attend this year's event – around 5,000 – retrogaming is no longer the fad that many are calling it. New dedicated websites are cropping up daily (videogameauctions.com is a current favourite), more retro compilations than ever are being released, and we're not even the only retro mag on the market any more…

"So what will you be doing to aid this retro revolution?" I hear you ask. Why, exactly what we've always done. This month we poke around the Amiga 500, we've got an exclusive interview with 8-bit god Raffaele Cecco and we've even found time for a chinwag with C64 music maestro Ben Daglish.

And to think there were cynics saying we would have run out of content by issue 17… Shame on you.



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED…

ITS TAKEN AGES, BUT SEGA'S FINALLY READY TO UPDATE ITS CLASSICS RANGE

While we applauded Sega when it first revealed its Sega Ages 2500 range for the PlayStation2, we can't say we were that impressed with the useless way it went about selling them to the masses. Rather than release the original arcade versions, Sega had each title graphically and sonically enhanced by an external developer, with the results being mixed, to say the least. While titles such as *Virtua Racing*, *Space Harrier* and *Out Run* at least managed to capture the look and feel of the original games, many of the remakes (particularly *Golden Axe*) were abominations that shouldn't have got past the playtesting stage.

Indeed, Sony of America was so disgusted with the series it only allowed Sega to release certain titles as part of a compilation (the so-so *Sega Classics Collection*) – quite a blow for Sega as all19 titles were originally released separately in Japan. Now, though, it appears that Sega has learnt from its mistakes, as it's making several changes to the series, and will hopefully turn the finished compilations and remakes into truly desirable titles.

As of volume 20 of Sega Ages 2500, Sega will be back in control of the franchise and will create and publish each new title. First up will be a *Space Harrier* collection that will include the original arcade game, the Master System conversion and the Mega Drive sequel *Space Harrier 2*. Due out in Japan on 29 September, it will be complemented by Volume 21 that will include arcade-perfect conversions of *SDI: Strategic Defence Initiative* and *Quartet*.

But perhaps the best news of all is that a Treasure Box compilation is finally in the works. The collection had been rumoured to appear on the Dreamcast, but Sega has finally announced that some of Treasure's best Mega Drive titles will be making their way to the PlayStation2. The excellent *Gunstar Heroes* will be joined by quirky platformer *Dynamite Headdy* and the insanely tough yet graphically incredible *Alien Soldier*. It's unclear if any further Treasure Mega Drive games will be included, or if the titles chosen will be the original games or updates, but at least it gives us hope for a future Saturn collection.

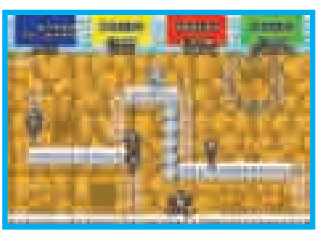
Sega's final compilation is a memorial disc that will include *Head On*, *Tranquilliser Gun* and *Doki Doki Penguin Land*. All discs will include a new Gallery mode that will feature flyers, advertisements and other materials and the instruction books will also include a developer commentary, so at least Sega is ensuring that gamers will get value for money.

As well as compilations Sega will also be releasing *Panzer Dragoon*, *Galaxy Force 2*, *Dynamite Deka* (or *Die Hard Arcade* as it's known in the UK), *Advanced Daisenryaku* and *Last Bronx*. Titles will range from a complete port of the original game to new updates with new gameplay elements and aesthetic updates.

Let's just hope Sega doesn't mess it up this time…







▲ All these classics are on their way – and hopefully they won't be too botched…

See you there

GAMES™ TO ATTEND THIS YEAR'S CGE UK

We're pleased to announce that games™ Retro will have its own stall at this year's Classic Gaming Expo and will be there for the entire day – a full nine hours of retro mayhem.

So if you fancy playing us at the oldest games around (we'll have a selection of different consoles and computers at the event) or just want to buy us a beer then get your ticket for the Fairfield Halls in Croydon on 13 August (details on page 160).

Oh, and rumours that we'll be selling subscriptions at gunpoint have been greatly exaggerated. It'll be knifepoint at most. Honest.

GAMING NEWS

Geriatric Gaming

OAP TRAVELS TO UK TO RECLAIM RETRO CROWN

One thing we're not looking forward to is becoming pensioners. The idea of spending our days in a home while our kids gather like vultures fills us with a clammy dread. So thank God for inspirational people like Doris Self.

The 81-year-old Florida resident is not only incredibly active but she's also the former world *Q-Bert* champion. While she lost her crown in 2003 to John Lawton – holder of the world *Depth Charge* title – she's determined to get it back. Sadly, her latest attempt ended in failure and she only managed a score of 931,900, some way short of the original 1.8 million score currently required.

The superannuated button-basher is determined not to give up, though, and will be appearing at this year's CGE UK in order to reclaim her title. If she's successful, she'll not only be the *Q-Bert* champion again, but will also be re-crowned the World's Oldest Videogame Champion. Best of luck, Doris.



What goes around comes around...

CRONOSOFT REVEALS NEW DEVELOPMENT DEAL

Retro publisher Cronosoft has announced a deal that will see it release tape and disc versions of Altern8's back catalogue. Titles such as *Fun Park*, *Gloop*, *Egghead In Space* and *Megablast* are just a few of the games that have been announced. Systems covered under the new deal will include the Amiga, ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64, and while many games will be re-releases, Altern8 and Cronosoft are promising that new and unreleased titles will be included in the deal.

"We have a passion for retro gaming, and feel that our games shouldn't just be available on emulators but on the real deal too," explained head of Altern8, Paul Andrews. Cronosoft owner Simon Ullyatt is also optimistic about the new deal and is looking forward to publishing the games. "Emulators are great, but you just can't beat the feel of a real machine," he said.

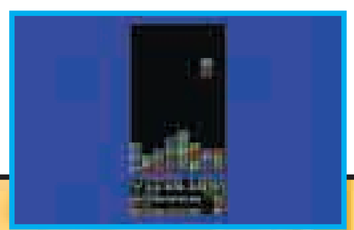
Tricky Viccy

NEW PUZZLE GAME GETS RELEASED FOR THE VIC-20

You might have consigned it to the attic, but the Vic-20 is still going strong – and now it's even got some brand new games.

ViColumn is Jason Kelk's take on Sega's *Columns* and is due for release on 13 August. Programmed using 100 per cent machine code and taking up a minuscule 3.58Kb of memory it's an impressive feat of programming and a very addictive game to boot. What's more, it will even run on an unexpanded machine, so every Vic-20 owner will be able to play it.

While it's not been possible to link diagonal columns or use the multiple matching that appeared in the original arcade version this is still a remarkable effort. You can check out the early preview copies on www.cronosoft.co.uk.



Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events...

AUGUST '05

CGE UK

Date: 13 August **Location:** Fairfield Halls, Croydon
Price: Adults (14+) – £10, Child (6-13) – £7.50, Child (under 6) – Free
After the success of last year's event, we've been told that this year's CGE UK is going to be even bigger. Look out for guest appearances from Walter Day, Matthew Smith, Archer Maclean, Jeff Minter and several ex-Ocean staff. Oh, and we'll be there as well.

Classic Gaming Expo (CGE)

Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA
Last year's event was attended by none other than Konami and Midway and proved to be a huge success. As the expo prepares to enter its eighth year, you can be sure that 2005's event will be even better.

SEPTEMBER '05

Taito Legends

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Empire Interactive **Price:** TBC
UK gamers are going to receive all sorts of Taito goodness when this fantastic retro collection hits the shelves. *Operation Wolf*, *The New Zealand Story*, *Elevator Action*, *Bubble Symphony*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Rastan* are just a few of the games to be included.

Jagfest '05

Date: TBC **Location:** TBC **Price:** TBC
Details are still sketchy at the moment, but we have been made aware that Jagfest UK will be returning this year. The event has been running for several years now and has slowly been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

Namco Museum 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Namco **Price:** TBC
The Xbox and PlayStation2 get their own dose of old-school arcade action with this collection of 14 Namco titles. The likes of *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Pole Position* will jostle for space with *Rolling Thunder* and *Galaga*.

Capcom Classics Collection

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBC
Another 'best-of' retro compilation, this time from Capcom. Some arguably fine titles are included (*1942*, *Street Fighter II*, *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*) but will a few extra features make this worth a purchase?

OCTOBER '05

Sega Classics Collection

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC
Sega's latest compilation features remakes of many of its classic arcade games and is available for PS2. *Golden Axe*, *Out Run*, *Space Harrier* and *Columns* are just a few of the games on the disc.

Midway Arcade Treasures 3

Date: TBC **Publisher:** Midway **Price:** TBC
Keen to try something new, Midway's third compilation has a racing theme and features the likes of *Hydro Thunder*, *S.T.U.N. Runner* and *Badlands*. Let's just hope *Hydro Thunder* is the original arcade game and not the mediocre PlayStation version.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk

CLASH OF THE TITANS

S•P•A•C•E H•A•R•R•I•E•R

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month we take a lot at the home conversions of Sega's *Space Harrier*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The arcade version of *Space Harrier* was all about the sheer adrenaline rush and while the C64 couldn't hope to match the arcade cab's impressive sprite scaling, it certainly manages to convey a gut-wrenching sense of speed. Huge, chunky sprites belt past you at an alarming rate and perfectly capture the spirit of its arcade parent.

SPECTRUM: Aaarggh! Our eyes! While this is certainly an ambitious port, the poor old Spectrum just can't cope with *Space Harrier*'s demands. The sprites are a fair representation of those in the original game, but they merge into the background and become near impossible to distinguish. The crippling lack of speed is the final straw.

AMSTRAD: While the Amstrad iteration maintains a decent sense of speed we're not too sure about its look: the backgrounds and main character are solid, everything else is wireframe. Granted, it helps to convey the original game's speed, but it gives the Amstrad outing a very disjointed style.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: We have a clear winner here. The C64 delivers a superb soundtrack that perfectly conveys the sprit of the original theme tune. Like the Amstrad version it's not exactly accurate but most gamers will instantly recognise it. Add some meaty spot effects that enhance the on-screen experience and the C64 gets another crucial point.

SPECTRUM: Oh dear. Not only is there no music on offer, but the sound effects are truly bizarre and totally unsuited to the on-screen 'action' (though the word hardly applies to the geriatric sprites). Many of the effects sound like they've been ripped from *Jet Set Willy* and ensure that the Spectrum loses yet another point.

AMSTRAD: What we have here is a bouncy little tune that's bolstered by some solid spot effects. Although the tune isn't as note perfect as the C64 rendition, the Amstrad sound chip at least makes an effort and delivers a solid if unspectacular rendition of *Space Harrier*'s classic theme tune.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: Despite the insane speed at which C64 *Space Harrier* moves, it's surprisingly easy to avoid everything that's thrown at you. This is mainly due to some well-drawn sprites that give a terrific sense of scale. Responsive controls and a nippy main character also help matters.

SPECTRUM: One word – rubbish. The biggest problem is that the atrocious sprite and stage design makes it stupidly hard to work out where your enemies are. Add to this an incredibly sluggish main character that appears to be battling through a sea of treacle and you have one dull gameplay experience that's as far from the original arcade experience as you could possibly get.

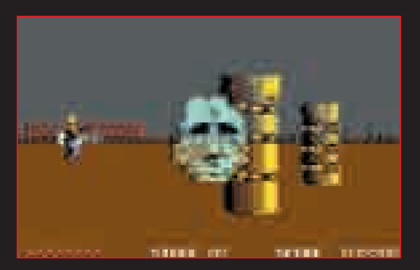
AMSTRAD: The Amstrad is let down by its poor representation of scale making it extremely hard to avoid things. There are no problems with the game's controls (although they lack the responsiveness of the C64) but avoiding trees and bushes is often down to luck as opposed to any sort of skill.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

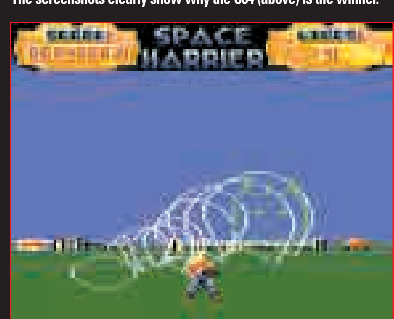


COMMODORE 64

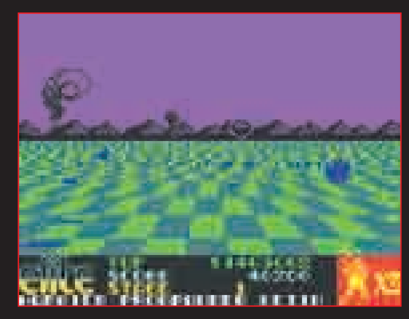
The C64 has been doing quite well recently and it manages to knock up yet another deserved win. This has been one of the worst rounds yet for the humble Speccy – let's hope it does better next month.



The screenshots clearly show why the C64 (above) is the winner.



Um, we think that's *Space Harrier* down there. Poor show, Speccy.





SPACE HARRIER (Various Home Systems) Erbe Software, 1986 – Original Spanish advertisement

Hardware Leg



MACHINE SPECIFICATIONS

PROCESSOR TYPE AND SPEED: 68000 at approximately 7.14MHz
LAUNCH PRICE: Approximately £500 + VAT
MEMORY: 512Kb RAM expandable up to 16Mb. The most popular expansion added 512Kb RAM plus a real-time clock.
SOUND: Four-channel sound (mono) or two stereo channels over nine octaves generated from the Paula chip. This could supposedly be 'multiplexed' giving it a maximum of 32 voices.
GRAPHICS CAPABILITIES: Varying resolutions between 320 x 200 up to 640 x 400 interlaced. Graphics powered by the Angus and Denise chips. A single screen could contain a mix of any graphics modes. The special HAM (Hold and Modify) mode handled interlacing and allowed a single screen to display 4,096 colours simultaneously. Denise held the sprite registers, of which there were eight but without vertical size limitations like on many other machines. The jewel in the crown of Amiga graphics was undoubtedly the Blitter. This was a powerful graphics mode, allowing the movement and manipulation of the screen's data very quickly. For the CPU to process screen data as swiftly as the Blitter, it was estimated that it would need to run at just over 70MHz.



AMIGA A500

"Is it a computer? Is it a games machine? No, it's an Amiga!" Retro takes a look at Commodore's hugely successful machine…

The Eighties and Nineties saw home computers thrive. More 'grown-up' and with more uses than consoles, yet home to some fantastically advanced games, machines from Atari and Amiga found favour with gamers whose parents also fancied a computer to handle the occasional spreadsheet. One system in particular managed to achieve spectacular success in the UK, and that was the Amiga A500.

Amiga started out as a company called Hi-Toro, set up in 1980 by former Atari employee Jay Miner. Miner had been one of the main driving forces behind the hugely popular VCS-2600 and powerful Atari 400 but he was reportedly somewhat frustrated by Atari's direction, probably due to the management under Warner Communications. Miner's dream was to develop a powerful home computer for the fast-growing market though Hi-Toro initially developed third-party controllers and peripherals for the likes of the Texas TI99/4 and Atari VCS.

In 1982, Hi-Toro changed its name to Amiga, with Miner successfully finding financial backers. To keep the backers happy, work began on a videogames system, but at the same time Miner built into the system the ability for it to be vastly upgraded from the intended base unit. The most important feature was that it included facilities for a keyboard and memory upgrades. This system was based on the powerful 16-bit 68000

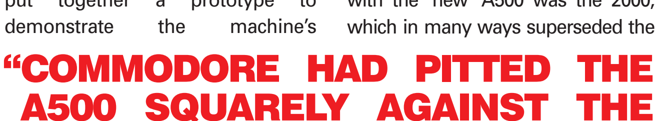
▲ The original Commodore Amiga. The A500 was more compact but kept the fantastically blocky mouse. Like holding a boxed deck of cards, it was.

processor, and included many custom chips which were to be its backbone.

However, plans changed in 1983 when the videogames market crashed spectacularly and Amiga, like many others, was fast losing money. The backers now wanted a home computer, fearing that a new console wouldn't be able to compete with the established competition and would ultimately fail.

And so the 1984 Computer Electronics Show saw the first public showing of the Amiga technology, then known as Lorraine. Miner and co put together a prototype to demonstrate the machine's capabilities. Running on the system was the now famous bouncing ball demo, and it caught the eye of Miner's old employer, Atari, as it and others were looking to develop 16-bit personal computers. Atari boss Jack Tramiel (founder and former head of Commodore) gave the team $500,000 to continue work on the project but when Amiga's money ran out Commodore stepped in and bought the company – and Lorraine – before Tramiel could snap it up. Commodore ploughed money into the project, even giving Amiga enough funds to repay Tramiel's loan, thus severing its links with Atari forever.





ENGLAND EXPECTS

News started reaching the UK of the new Amiga computer in 1985, and the May 1986 edition of *Commodore Computing International* (*CCI*) carried a full feature of what was then the Amiga 1000 and its unique hardware. As you'd expect, the feature warmed to the machine, pointing out its multi-tasking capabilities along with the advanced audio and visual handling. The problem for Commodore was the machine's price, as most users wanting the brand either chose its Commodore 64 for games or Commodore 128 as a poor man's business micro.

It wasn't until 1987, with the re-packaged Amiga A500, that Commodore could manufacture the technology at a friendlier price. Along with the 'new' A500 was the 2000, which in many ways superseded the 1000 and was aimed at the business end of the market.

CCI's May 1987 edition reported on the new computers, declaring them "the worst-kept secret in the crazy world of computing". The A500 was basically a repackaged 1000 with 512Kb as standard held in a single casing similar in design to the Commodore 128, but also housing a built-in 3.5-inch disk drive. The A500 was effectively therefore a new home computer based on older technology for the business market – in many ways like the PC today. The intended launch price of just under £500 (plus VAT) brought it closer to the Atari ST's price bracket and for the first time the Amiga could compete in the home user market.

The scheduled UK launch for the A500 was June 1987, and with it came the software companies that had avoided the Amiga platform due to the 1000's high price and business image. *Defender Of The Crown* from Mindscape was one of the first big releases on the cards for the A500. Rather too enthusiastically, though, *CCI* said that "it isn't too much to say that the 16-/32-bit software that will emerge to satisfy the Amiga market will make the 64 software of today look like the kind of things played on old Sinclair 1 or 2k machines." Indeed, early releases may have had a slight edge cosmetically over many C64 counterparts, but it would be some time before such wild claims would ring true.

POPULARITY AND PIRACY

Commodore had pitted the A500 squarely against the Atari ST. Although the A500 was the more technically impressive machine, the ST had a head start with an earlier launch and growing software base. Commodore UK's marketing department would soon go into overdrive on the Amiga, in many ways neglecting its 8-bit machines in favour of the A500. By the important Christmas period of 1987 some dealers had started to form their own bundles, and if you looked in the right place you could pick up an A500 with software for just £450 plus VAT.

What really put the Amiga on the map as a games machine, though, was Commodore UK's 'Bat Pack'. Tim

I ❤ THE AMIGA A500

The A500 was a true powerhouse in gaming terms. It's not often that computers were chosen based solely on the intro of a game, but *Shadow Of The Beast II*, despite being too difficult to play, certainly drew you in with its eerie and impressive opening sequence. The A500 represented the biggest leap forward in affordable and powerful technology. Though many companies had tried, it was this great machine that broke into the home market successfully, albeit if only in the UK and Germany. It is for this reason, though, that it saw so much great software, with companies such as Ocean, Psygnosis, Gremlin, Mindscape and other big names providing the most playable games of the day.

SHAUN BEBBINGTON





◀ Mindscape was one of the first big names to pledge its support to the new A500.
▼ An early Psygnosis ad – look, actual Amiga screenshots! Woo!
▶ The Bat Pack was one of the more popular A500 bundles offered by Commodore.





Burton's dark interpretation of the Batman myth was hugely popular in the cinemas and Ocean's game *Batman: The Movie* was well received by the popular press. Bundling the A500 with this new game, along with *The New Zealand Story* and *F18 Interceptor*, was a stroke of genius from Commodore. Even at £399 (this time including VAT), this was the machine on many gamers' Christmas list, and with it Commodore had finally hit back at the ST.

With the growing number of users came two things: one good and one (from an industry viewpoint) bad. Programmers and musicians quickly developed for the A500, which led to a very healthy public domain (PD) and demo scene, producing software that could be spread cheaply and easily. This saw the rise of many PD libraries. One of the more famous of these was 17-bit software, later becoming Team 17.

Although the Work Bench disk copier was able to copy PD software, commercial wares usually had copy protection. In order to spread the latest games, cracking groups quickly formed as did more sophisticated copiers. Due to this, the latest cracked Amiga games became another form of playground currency, just like the many C90 tapes before them.

DAMN YANKEES

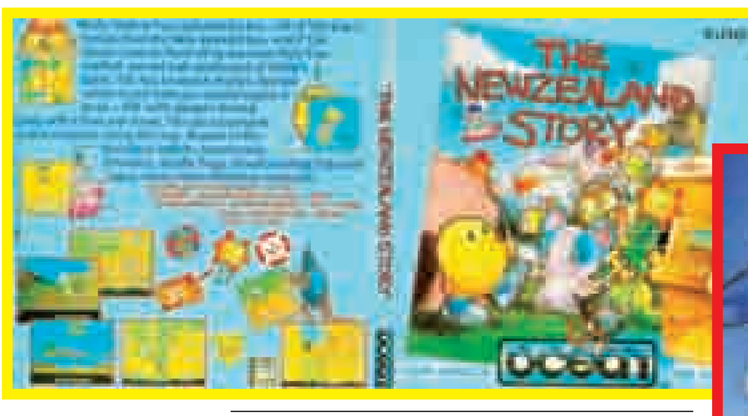
The American market wasn't too kind to the Amiga. Whereas its C64 platform was Commdore's bread and butter there, the Amiga didn't fare too well. Total sales of the entire Amiga range were around 750,000 units for the US and Canada. To put that into perspective, Commodore's 128 sold over a million units in the US, and around 1,500,000 Amigas were sold in the UK (about 30 per cent of total worldwide sales). The fact that US gamers didn't warm to the Amiga was probably due to poor marketing. While Commodore offered the C64 as a 'poor man's business machine', promoting and supporting the operating system GEOS and offering memory upgrades, the Amiga was unable to compete against the likes of the established IBM PC and compatibles or the Apple range.

"THE A500 GAVE MANY PEOPLE THEIR FIRST TASTE OF REAL 16-BIT GAMING"

By 1993 it was clear that Commodore was in trouble. The CD32 that Commodore UK had developed (something which was a nice upgrade to the poorly conceived CDTV in 1990) showed signs of a cash-strapped company; the controller was pretty poorly designed, for instance.

By early 1994 it was the end of the road for Commodore, with the parent company Commodore International filling for bankruptcy in April of that year. Sadly, just two months later Jay Miner, known as the father of the Amiga, passed away.

The A500 had been a massive success in the UK and parts of Europe, most notably Germany. Thanks to its custom chips and Miner's vision for a powerful personal computer it allowed the creation of sophisticated and elegant software, and gave many people their first taste of 16-bit gaming. ●



The Amiga led the way for CD-based systems but the CD32 wasn't really a hit. ▶

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Of course, in order to establish the A500 as a gaming machine it needed to have not only games worth buying but also its own magazines. *CCI* had supported the Amiga from the early days of the 1000 and was more of a computing magazine despite carrying a substantial amount of reviews. *Commodore User* jumped on board early in the A500's life, which later became a dedicated Amiga magazine (*CU Amiga*). But the most popular Amiga magazine was undoubtedly *Amiga Format*. Published between 1989 and 2000, the mag covered the gaming and technical sides of the machine. Special editions of the magazine were sometimes bundled with new Amigas, boosting sales of the mag to over 160,000.



BLUFFERS' GUIDE TO THE A500

- **The machine's custom chip-set and architecture worked in such an effective way that the processor was largely idle, allowing it to multi-task. Although it was not the first machine to do so, one might argue that it was the first popular personal computer that could.**
- **The Amiga is also often incorrectly referred to as the first 16-bit home computer. Texas Instruments had a 16-bit machine in 1981, the TI99/4a. It is also a common myth that the Amiga was launched before the Atari ST. The ST was launched first and was about half the price of an Amiga 1000, which launched in the US at around $1,300.**
- **The Amiga 1000 was used to generate sound effects for Channel 4's *Chart Show* and computer-generated images for the TV show *Knightmare* that ran on ITV from 1987 to 1994. Ironically, the official *Knightmare* computer game released on the A500 was a bit pants by comparison.**
- **Around five million Amigas were sold between 1985 and 1994. Just over half of these were A500s.**

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE



NAM-1975

HOW DO YOU KNOW? YOU WEREN'T THERE, MAN!

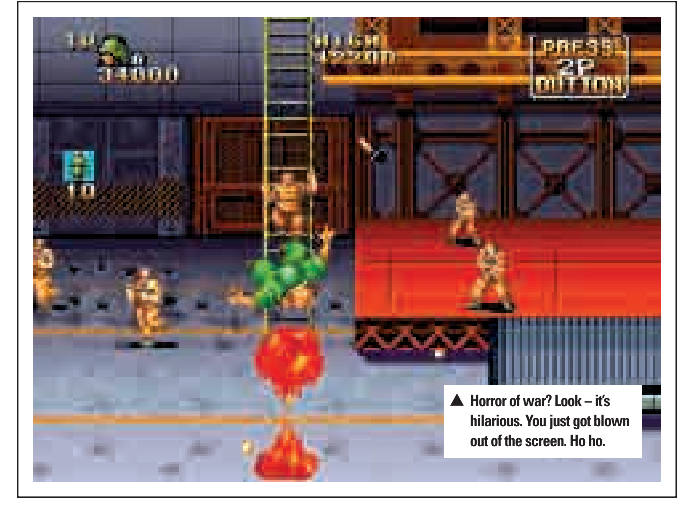
Release: 1990
Format: Neo-Geo MVS/AES/CD
Publisher: SNK
Developer: In-House

If you're the kind of cynic that thinks the Neo-Geo is an overpriced console with way too many beat-'em-ups, allow us to change your blinkered view. First, many of its fighters are absolutely superb, and second, if you're prepared to do a little digging you'll find a plethora of genres on SNK's behemoth of a console.

Puzzlers, shmups and sports games – particularly baseball and football titles – are plentiful, but the Neo-Geo's ridiculous price tag (a new machine cost £500 even back in the Nineties) meant that few were able to enjoy its delights. Sadly, this hasn't changed in recent years and you'll see little change from £1,000 if you're after titles like the excellent *Metal Slug*. Fortunately, certain Neo-Geo titles can be picked up for less than £20 nowadays and one such gem is SNK's *Nam-1975*.

Debuting as a Neo-Geo launch title, *Nam-1975* was a nifty little shooter that played very much like a side-scrolling version of *Cabal* or *Blood Brothers*. Seeing you sent back to the Vietnam jungle to rescue Dr R Muckley, *Nam-1975* started off tough and continued to punish you.

As with *Cabal*, a cursor could be directed anywhere on the screen in order to take care of soldiers, tanks, jet fighters and anything else your opponent was prepared to throw at you. The downside to all this on-screen carnage was that your soldier couldn't move while he fired his gun, making him an easy target. Thus the average game of *Nam-1975* would see your seasoned grunt frantically dashing along the bottom of the screen, only stopping to unleash the occasional devastating barrage of fire.



▲ Horror of war? Look – it's hilarious. You just got blown out of the screen. Ho ho.

As with *Cabal*, defeated enemies would drop power-ups and points, and providing you were quick enough it was possible to arm your grunt with dual sights (making enemies much easier to hit), a rapid-fire machine gun and a superb flamethrower that belched forth a satisfying stream of fire. Grenades were also a staple part of your soldier's supplies and a well-placed metal egg could destroy tanks, down helicopters and even level buildings (providing enough incendiaries had been thrown at them).

Later stages featured captured prisoners who'd join you once their captors had been killed, and they loyally stayed with you until you lost a life. And then, of course, there were the huge end-of-level bosses to worry about…

But perhaps the most notable aspect of *Nam-1975* was the humour that SNK had slyly woven into the game. While not as tongue in cheek or frequent as in the later *Metal Slug* series, it was easy to see where Nazca had found some of *Slug*'s inspiration. Shoot a falling parachutist on level three and the hapless soldier would hilariously plummet to his death. Similarly, should your soldier get hit by a grenade the resulting explosion would hurl him out of the screen. Sure, they were only little touches but they neatly juxtaposed the insane carnage that was playing out in front of you and provided some welcome light relief.

Even today *Nam-1975* remains an enjoyable experience and is a great introduction to the Neo-Geo's back catalogue. While it's by no means a graphically stunning title, it's still packed with a fair amount of detail and the visuals do improve as you progress deeper into the game.

If you're looking for an unadulterated gameplay experience but don't fancy re-mortgaging your house, *Nam-1975* is definitely the game for you.



CHUCK ROCK II: SON OF CHUCK

PAPA WAS A RETRO STONE

Release: 1993
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Core Design
Developer: In-House

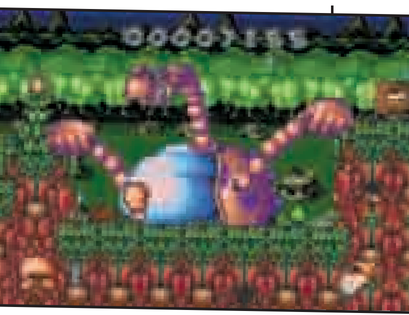
A diplodocus named Derek might not be your average videogame boss, but he certainly manages to make a sizeable impression when he appears for the first time in Core's superior caveman sequel.

After his dad gets kidnapped Chuck Jr braves the beautiful, multi-parallax scrolling jungle in order to rescue his beloved pops. Along the way he encounters cavemen with detachable wigs, troublesome pterodactyls and all sorts of other bizarre beasts. Nothing can prepare him for his meeting with Derek, though, and while the lumbering dino has a fairly straightforward attack pattern, he could still be a pain for the uninitiated.

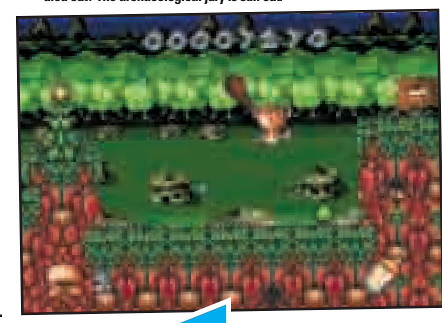
Arriving in a small clearing, two huge claws are the first warning of Derek's imminent appearance and Chuck Jr is trapped with nowhere to hide. Luckily, our hero is quite a resilient little fella and as soon as Derek reveals his long snaking neck and a girth that would put Bernard Manning to shame our little hero is ready for him.

Derek's head hypnotically weaves backwards and forwards and appears completely impervious to Junior's frantic club attacks. Then, without warning, Derek slams his head on the ground and he tries to chow down on his nappy-wearing foe.

But Junior is having none of it and quickly sidesteps the dino's lunges. Poor old Derek not only receives a mouthful of dirt for his troubles but also takes a severe clubbing to the noggin. As Chuck Jr's attack continues, plasters start to appear all over the dino's face and all the giant lizard can do is admit a miserable defeat, allowing our jubilant hero to continue his quest.



▲ Club-wielding delinquents – the reason dinosaurs died out? The archaeological jury is still out.



Great RETRO Gaming Moments

"THERE'S SOMETHING OUT THERE AND IT AIN'T NO GAME"

PREDATOR

▼ Yes it's blocky, but it's *tense, imminent death* blocky.



Release: 1987
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Source Software

It may have been based on a kick-ass Arnie flick, but *Predator* was one woeful piece of code. In fact, it came dangerously close to appearing in this month's Worse Licence Ever feature. So it's lucky we remembered its one redeeming feature and by golly it's a good 'un.

Picture the scene: your squad of marines had bravely (perhaps foolishly) set off into the blocky jungle eager for a firefight. Arnie stumbled after them – the animation really has to be seen to be believed – and quickly discovered that the jungle's literally crawling with enemies. Still, you're Arnie and the Austrian Oak isn't afraid of anything. Grenades at the ready and guns blazing you brutally tore apart anyone that got in your way, hoping that things would not only get better but justify your expensive purchase. But just as you were about to reach for the off switch something magical happened…

Suddenly the screen was awash with cold blues and reds and a conspicuous triangle started to track your movement. Panic quickly rising you thrust the joystick in whatever direction would get you away from those damn crosshairs… then you caught sight of what would be the first of many of your fallen buddies. Distracted by this turn of events – or perhaps your sweaty hand simply slipped from the stick – you were caught in the Predator's sights and immediately joined your fallen friend. The hunter had become the hunted…

Raffaele Cecco is the king of the Spectrum shooters, no doubt about it. So when he disappeared from the gaming scene a few years ago, we made it our mission to find him and ask about his wonderful games until he was all out of answers…

RAFFAELE CECCO

RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
Developer lookback

Imagine you've just got home from work to find that a sheet of paper has been pushed through your letterbox. On the paper is a telephone number and a request to get in touch with a magazine you've never heard of that's been scribbled down by a neighbour – would you make that call? Luckily for us, curiosity got the better of Raffaele Cecco so he rang us up – if only to find out how the hell we'd managed to track him down…

Cecco should be well-known to retro gamers. He sprang onto the scene in the mid-Eighties thanks to the vibrant style of his games such as *Exolon*, *Cybernoid* and *Stormlord*. In the course of his 8-bit career his titles received numerous accolades (including three *Crash* Smashes and four *Amstrad Action* Master Game awards) and earned high praise from critics and gamers alike.

After working for a while in the 16-bit console and computer market Cecco decided that it was the right time to form his own studio and he launched King Of The Jungle in 1995. Sadly, the new venture was unable to match the glory of Cecco's 8- and 16-bit days and went bankrupt in 2003.

Since then Cecco has all but disappeared, which explains why we had to ring his neighbour to ask about getting that note through the legendary developer's door…



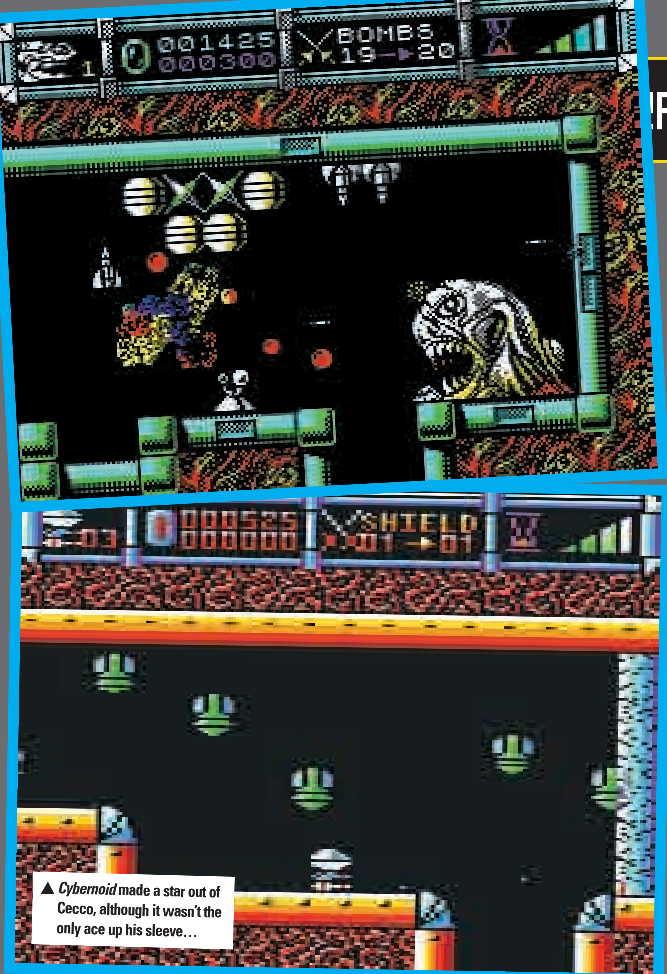


▲ Mr Cecco – as he was at the height of his fame, and now looking like… well, a fairly normal guy really.

games™: What's your earliest videogame experience?

Raffaele Cecco: We'd have to go way back in time to answer this one – more than 26 years I think. My memory is a bit hazy nowadays, but it was probably a Binatone Video Olympics 'games console' that featured various games based around *Pong* that we received with a TV set that my parents had rented. I was so fascinated by how this thing worked that I proceeded to dismantle it and ended up getting very confused by everything that was inside. Otherwise I remember playing lots of arcade games like *Space Invaders*, *Phoenix* and *Defender* in the





▲ *Cybernoid* made a star out of Cecco, although it wasn't the only ace up his sleeve…

local kebab shops near my school, and finally getting an Atari VCS one Christmas. I was in absolute heaven when it arrived.

gTM: When did you realise that you wanted to create games?

RC: It was when I was about 13 and my parents bought me a Sinclair ZX81. I remember constantly pestering them for it and having to wait ages for the thing to actually arrive. It eventually came, along with a good book about programming in BASIC, and I was absolutely hooked. I wrote a very simple game where you moved left and right and had to avoid lots of asterisks that dropped downwards. Sadly, I could never save my work because the tape loading was so unreliable.

gTM: Were your parents worried that you joined the industry at such a young age?

RC: I don't think so. I got offered my first job when I was 17 and they were very pleased for me. It did mean that I had to leave home, though. I was living in north London at the time and the company, Mikro-Gen, was based in Ashford in Surrey, so it was too much of a slog to travel there every day. Obviously, my parents were sad to see me go, but pleased I was doing something that I loved.

gTM: Tell us more about joining Mikro-Gen.

RC: Well, I'd sent a couple of graphics demos out to both Dalali Software and Mikro-Gen and, luckily, both companies offered me jobs. I eventually decided to go with Mikro-Gen as it had already had a couple of hit games including *Automania* and *Everyone's A Wally*. There were also some really excellent people working there that I could (and did) learn a lot from, so it was a very wise move.

gTM: You've worked with Nick 'Captain of Coding' Jones on many games. How did your relationship come about?

RC: Nick started work at Mikro-Gen just before I did and we became good friends. It seemed natural to carry on working together after we left Mikro-Gen, and Nick did several excellent conversions of my Spectrum games for the C64. We kept in touch for a while after Nick left for the USA to work at Shiny with David Perry (also ex-Mikro-Gen), and we met up a few times. Unfortunately, we've now lost touch, but I'm sure we can track each other down again. ▶

CYBERNOID

Cybernoid (1987) was Cecco's first *Crash* Smash and played like a cross between the classic *Thrust* and a standard shooter. By using a flick-screen approach, Cecco was able to create an interesting balance between frantic, all-out blasting and head-scratching puzzles. While Nick Jones took care of programming the Commodore 64 version, Cecco would always take care of the Amstrad conversions.

"It took me just two days to convert the Spectrum code to work on the Amstrad CPC, which also included me having to redraw all the graphics," recalls Cecco. "I remember being utterly exhausted after that. Sadly, the Amstrad conversions of my games were always an unwelcome but necessary milestone at the end of a Spectrum project."

They may have been unwelcome, but Cecco certainly made sure they weren't bog-standard ports, and every Amstrad title he worked on was significantly superior to its (already impressive) Spectrum counterpart.



"AMSTRAD CONVERSIONS OF MY GAMES WERE AN UNWELCOME MILESTONE"

EXOLON



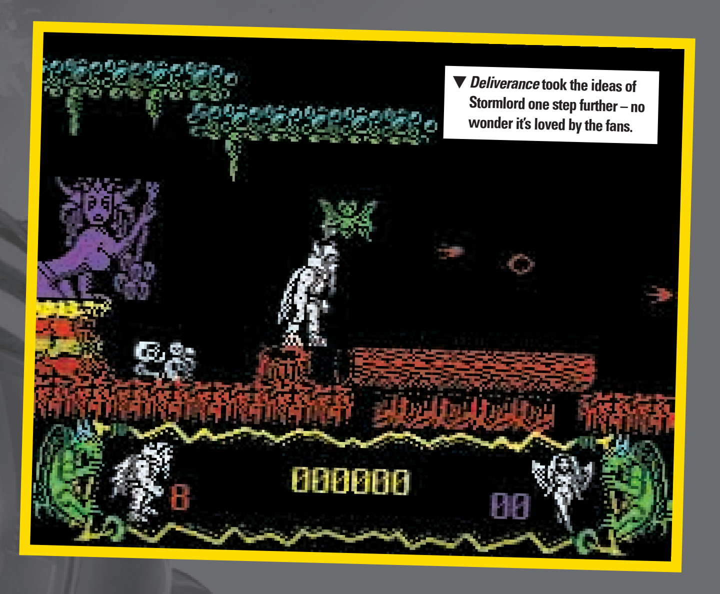
Cecco's fascination with sci-fi emerged again in the superb but tough *Exolon* (1987), which became his second *Crash* Smash. This time, the player took control of a soldier who had to negotiate his way through some extremely unforgiving terrain and as with *Cybernoid* the game featured gorgeous visuals, was pixel-perfect and had sections that could be frustrating beyond belief.

"I was running short of time on *Exolon* and still had a few levels to create," recalls Cecco. "I vaguely recollect taking one of the early levels and flipping it left-to-right in order to create a new one. Fortunately, I don't think anybody noticed."

Design short-cuts aside, *Exolon* proved to be another huge hit for Cecco and it was rather surprising when Hewson never announced a sequel. "To be honest, I don't think the scope for a sequel was as wide as *Cybernoid's*," says Cecco. "*Exolon* was a much simpler game, and a sequel would have been harder to vary from the original."







▼ *Deliverance* took the ideas of Stormlord one step further – no wonder it's loved by the fans.

gTM: What was it like moving to Hewson?

RC: I initially approached them with a demo for *Exolon* after I left Mikro-Gen. They were very keen, and they gave me a freelance contract in order to finish it. I never worked from their offices but I certainly enjoyed creating games for them at home even though the financial rewards were never, shall we say, completely fulfilled… They had some good, friendly people there as well including the excellent programmer Dominic Robinson who coded *Zynaps*.

gTM: You must have felt pretty pleased with the accolades that *Cybernoid* received

RC: Oh, I was very happy. It was quite surreal walking round WH Smiths and seeing my game all over the front cover of so many magazines. I'd worked really hard on that project and it was great having that hard work finally appreciated by others.

gTM: Was there much pressure from Hewson while you were working on *Cybernoid 2*?

RC: There was always pressure from Hewson! *Cybernoid* had been such a success that it made perfect sense to do a sequel. Of course, it was similar but for me it certainly wasn't a cash-in. From a purely creative and technical point of view it was an opportunity to expand upon the original technology and concept.

gTM: *Exolon* was yet another deserved *Crash* Smash. Did the fame ever go to your head?

RC: Having your work acclaimed certainly gives you professional self-confidence, but I'd like to think that it didn't go to my head. At the end of the day I was a programmer and a games designer, not a rock star or movie star. I think instances where attempts have been made to portray individuals in the games industry as such have been pretty ridiculous. I remember a phase where any magazine article about developers featured photos of them wearing dark shades, desperately trying to look cool. Very funny! These days any successful game is a big team effort, and I think it's unfair that there are so many unsung heroes working hard behind the scenes.

gTM: Many of your games feature a science-fiction theme – any particular reason?

RC: Not really. When I was younger I'd read the odd Asimov and watched all the camp sci-fi TV programmes like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers*, but I was never a huge fan. From a games design perspective, sci-fi is simply an easy option because there

"I ADMIRE THE TENACITY OF ANYONE WHO MANAGED TO FINISH ONE OF MY GAMES"

are no limits to what you can do. Fundamentally, arcade games stripped to their bare bones are about geometric shapes and how they interact physically. If those shapes don't behave in normal, everyday ways they just paint them with some sci-fi elements and it all makes sense.

g™: Was this one of the reasons why *Stormlord* was such a big departure from your previous games?

RC: I wanted to move away from the hardcore sci-fi stuff and do something more pretty and fantasy-like. I can't say I'm a big fan, but Tolkien, *Midsummer Night's Dream* and so on definitely influenced me. I'd love to see this kind of theme used in a game for the next gen – imagine how gorgeous and magical it could look.

g™: Did *Stormlord*'s half-naked fairies cause any problems?

RC: Hewson liked the fairies (we all like naked fairies, right?), but I was asked to remove a very subtle but highly suggestive animation on the main title screen. Those fairies were a pain to draw because I couldn't get the legs looking right. The breasts were perfect, but the lower part of the legs looked absolutely awful, so in the end I just gave up and stuck her in a pot!

g™: Your games are generally regarded as having gorgeous visuals but being rather tough to play. Was it always your intention to make them such a challenge?

RC: In those days, the term 'learning curve' didn't really exist for me. I did most of the playtesting myself, which meant that over several months I became completely desensitised to how hard they actually were. I assumed because I found the game easy enough, other people would too. I was wrong! I apologise for making people pull their hair out playing my games, and I admire the tenacity of anyone who managed to finish them!

g™: Have you had a chance to look at the remakes of your classic games over at www.retrospec.sgn.net?

RC: I've looked at the remakes and I'm very flattered that somebody has actually spent the time and effort to reproduce my games. It's nice seeing them with more up to date graphics and sound. I must say revisiting my games after all these years really does show me how hard I made them. I had problems getting past the first two screens of *Cybernoid 2*!

g™: How did you find working on *Licence To Kill*?

RC: Well, I did *Licence To Kill* as a freelancer for Domark and it was purely conversion work from the 16-bit versions. Sadly, I didn't have any involvement with the film company but I did get an early look at the film at Pinewood Studios, which was pretty exciting at the time.

g™: *Solomon's Key* was the only arcade conversion you worked on for the 8-bit machines. Was it tough trying to cram the entire arcade game into a humble 8-bit computer?

RC: No, but it was certainly tough trying to cram an entire arcade machine into my living room! I had no source code to work from, just this behemoth of an arcade machine looming over me as I worked. I had to literally play the game from end to end, taking notes and making diagrams as I did so. Needless to say, I became rather good at it – thank God it was on free play.

g™: So how do you feel about emulation? Do you have a problem with your games being available on sites like World Of Spectrum?

RC: I don't see it as a problem at all, as I don't actually own the rights to my early games; the rights stayed ▶



▼ The world of *Stormlord* was vivid and detailed, making the game really stand out. Mmm, fairies.

STORMLORD

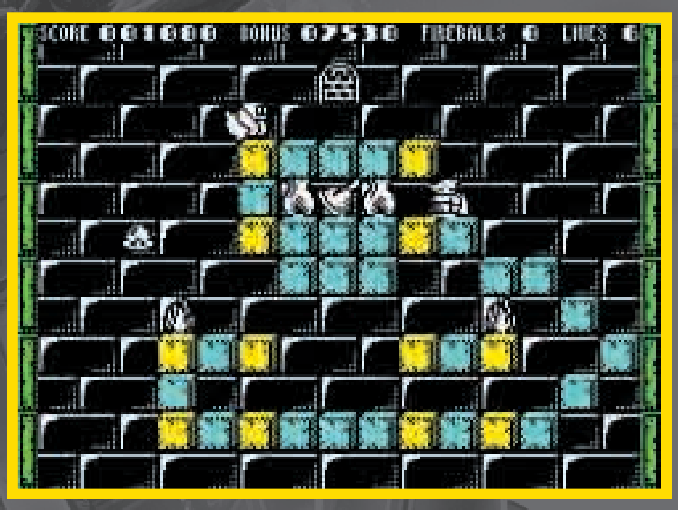
Stormlord (1989) and its sequel *Deliverance* were a huge departure for Cecco in terms of aesthetics, but still featured the same pixel-perfect timing and solid level design that had made the programmer's name. *Stormlord* also had a lot more depth than his previous work, and your main character was able to use various objects in order to solve simple puzzles (think *Dizzy* but with none of the annoying somersaulting). But while *Stormlord*'s production went relatively smoothly it wasn't without problems…

"I remember struggling with a random crash bug and had spent about three days trying to track it down," explains Cecco. "This was really bad news for me, as I normally sorted out bugs within a day. It turned out to be a faulty power supply that would reset the Spectrum whenever it got too hot. Needless to say, I wasn't pleased, and learnt not to blindly trust hardware from that point on."



with the publishers at the time – I was very young, naïve and didn't get legal advice. You live and learn.

I could probably apply for some kind of retrospective rights for my original titles, as I was the author, designer and programmer. I don't see the point now though, as they are remembered as my games regardless of the publishers, and I don't think there is much money in emulated Spectrum games. I think emulation in general is fine as long as no-one is actually losing income. Certainly, I think something like MAME is actually an important historical and cultural archive, as it would be a travesty to lose all those old games.



gTM: How did you find the jump from 8- to 16-bit machines?

RC: It was actually very easy. Any new hardware poses initial problems and a steep learning curve, but you had more memory, faster processors and better graphics. Of course, to get the best out of the 16-bits you still had to use lots of tricks. Both 8- and 16-bit machines were a pleasure to work with, though, as you were dealing directly with the hardware in assembly language or machine code. There were no high-level languages like C++, libraries or other bumf – just you and the hardware.

gTM: Where did the inspiration for *First* and *Second Samurai* come from?

RC: The original idea came from a samurai comic, whose name evades me now, but was about ronin warriors avenging their master's death. There was an artist who was supposed to be designing the levels but he just couldn't get the gist of designing playable maps, so it was left to me at the end, along with the coding. Even though I was designing the levels, this was the first project where I wasn't creating the actual graphics. I'm not an artist and the limitations of my graphics drawing talents had been reached with the 8-bit machines really.

gTM: So which of your games would you like to see updated for the current generation?

RC: All of them, of course! I'd be especially interested to see if a pixel-perfect game like *Cybernoid* would work, though, as I'm not sure if you could get that accuracy or awareness of your surroundings in a 3D environment. Games like *Exolon* and *Cop-out* would simply end up as first-person shooters, as would *Stormlord*, but with thunderbolts instead of bullets.

To be honest, though, I think many 8- and 16-bit games worked so well in 2D they are best left alone. You couldn't charge £30 for them, but they'd work very nicely as a compilation.

gTM: So which Raff Cecco game would you say best sums up Raff Cecco?

RC: Of my own titles I'd probably say *Cybernoid*, as it was the combination of frantic action, colourful graphics, big explosions and sneakily designed levels that became my trademark for a while.

gTM: How did you come to set up King Of The Jungle? Was it an easy process?

RC: I'd been working on a freelance basis for a company called Vivid Image for quite a few years and had worked on *First* and *Second Samurai* and created the concept for a racing game on the Super Nintendo called *Street Racer*. Initially, Nick Jones started work on *Street Racer* but left very early on when he was offered a job opportunity at Shiny in the USA. Naturally he took the job, but courteously 'broke in' new recruits, ex-Domark twins Chris and Tony West. They were car mad (as well as being an excellent programming and art team) so the *Street Racer* concept was perfect for them. Around the same time Stephane Koenig joined as a producer.

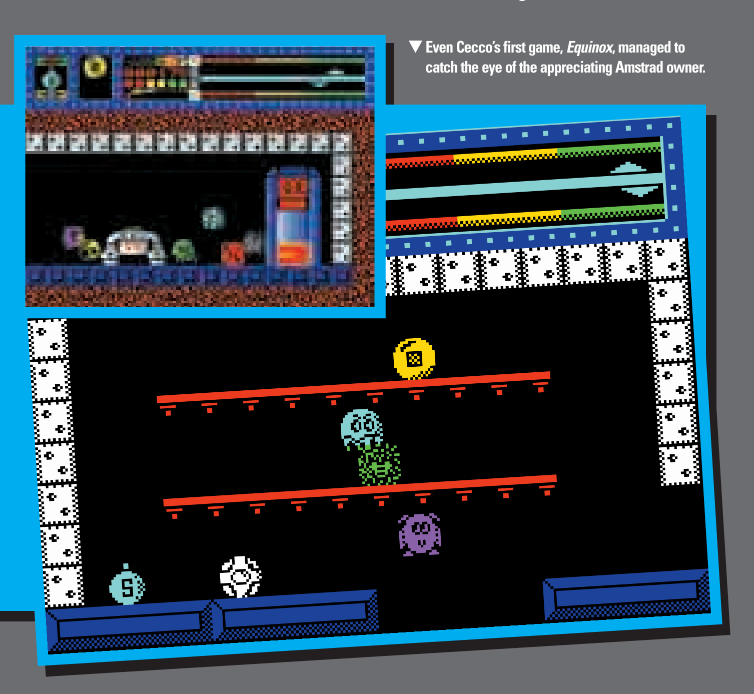
The four of us got on really well, especially Steph and myself, and *Street Racer* was a great success for Vivid Image, getting excellent reviews and selling loads. I'd been getting itchy feet for a while and thought it was the perfect opportunity to break away with the three other guys and start our own company. Basically, we walked into Virgin Interactive with our

EQUINOX

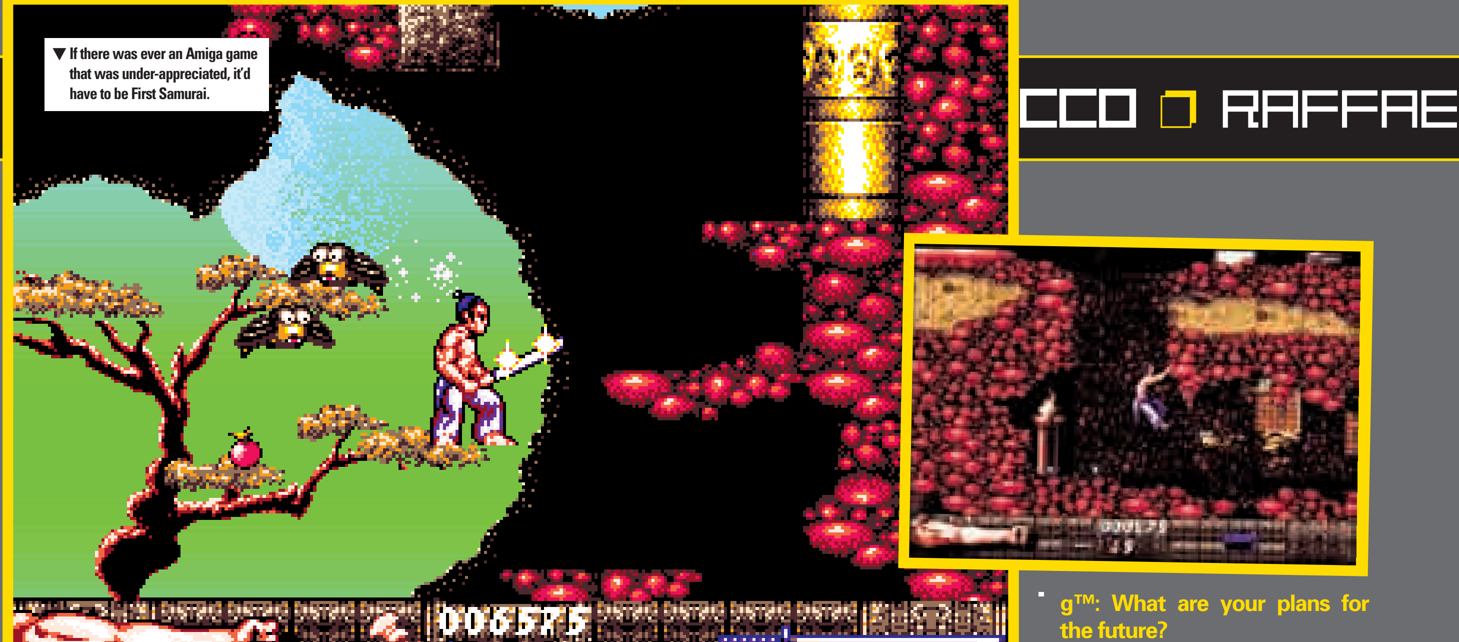
E*quinox* (1986) was one of Cecco's earliest titles but it's obvious that it became the perfect springboard for *Cybernoid*. Many of *Cybernoid*'s elements are strikingly similar to those seen in *Equinox* and it also marked Cecco's first collaboration with Nick Jones.

Taking control of a disposal droid you had to negotiate a series of tricky screens – notice a pattern here? – in search of radioactive canisters. Cecco has fond memories of the game and puts its success down to Chris Hinsley. "All the guys [at Mikro-Gen] learnt a lot from Chris," he says. "He was a brilliant programmer and games designer and really took me under his wing. I learnt a hell of a lot under his supervision."

The other aspect of *Equinox* that Cecco remembers is the sheer amount of work that went into its six-month development. "Games programmers in those days were certainly renaissance men, drawing their own graphics and creating their own sound effects," explains Cecco. "I even remember writing the blurb on the back of the box. Basically the game was a nice and simple arcade/puzzle type of thing, and we simply bolted the story on afterwards."



▼ Even Cecco's first game, *Equinox*, managed to catch the eye of the appreciating Amstrad owner.



▼ If there was ever an Amiga game that was under-appreciated, it'd have to be First Samurai.

"I THINK SO MANY 8- AND 16-BIT GAMES WORK WELL IN 2D THEY'RE BEST LEFT ALONE"

track history and walked out with a £1 million deal.

gTM: Where did the company's name come from?

RC: The name King Of The Jungle came from an idea I'd had for a beat-em-up based around different animals. The game never saw the light of day but I thought it would make a great company name. Interestingly enough, we had to get permission from Prince Charles' solicitor to use the word 'king'. They do some checks to make sure you're not a porn company or doing anything dodgy.

gTM: Were you pleased with the games that King Of The Jungle created?

RC: Certainly some were better than the others, but we worked hard and finished all of our titles. I was very pleased with *B-Movie (Invasion From Beyond Abroad)* as it was different – manically fast with a nice splash of humour thrown in. We finished it on time and it reviewed well. Towards the end, the industry was becoming difficult and the option to do original work was becoming scarcer, so we took on less glamorous projects like *Galaga – Destination Earth* and *Championship Manager Quiz*; I was just pleased the company was being supported.

Ironically, the game I was most proud of was a playable demo codenamed *Explosion Royale* that I had put together over a couple of months with our brilliant creative director Joe Myers (now at Kuju). It looked fantastic, with great physics, vehicles and weapons. Unfortunately, King Of The Jungle closed before we could place it with a publisher.

gTM: What can you tell us about King of the Jungle's demise?

RC: Ha! How many pages have you got? It was a mixture of inexperienced management, egos and a very difficult time in the industry, as well as publishers letting us down (slow payments and so on). In the end, we had a fantastic demo but no publisher was interested. Many publishers were having a hard time and couldn't take a risk on an original product no matter how good it looked.

In retrospect, the biggest mistake we made was making original games. We should have established a reputation doing licensed products and sequels. Small developers doing original titles have been decimated in the UK, and I admire those that have managed to survive.

gTM: What did you do after King Of The Jungle closed?

RC: After King Of The Jungle closed, Stephane Koenig and myself bought back the rights to *Groove Rider* from the liquidator as it was practically finished. We completed it and had it published by Play It, so that kept us occupied for a little while. After that, Steph left for a job in the US, leaving me to ponder on what I wanted to do next. At the same time, my daughter was born and, frankly, I needed a break from the games industry after 20 years.

Suitably refreshed, I decided that the games industry wasn't for me any more, as I'd actually stopped playing games. I did a lot of research into web technologies, e-commerce, and the internet in general and concluded that the internet needed a way for the average person to produce amazing web content that goes way beyond what they can currently do with the usual picture albums and blogs. The end result is a project called mypinboard.com, and I invite everyone to check it out at www.mypinboard.com.

gTM: What are your plans for the future?

RC: Well, I still love programming or designing software and my company will continue developing mypinboard.com to become the de facto popular choice for creating amazing web content. The web is still a 'wild frontier', as far as technology and ideas go, similar to the way the games industry felt 20 years ago. Add an instant potential market of nearly a billion users, lower cost development with no middlemen, and you can see why it's so attractive to me.

gTM: So no return to the games industry then?

RC: I had a great time in the past and worked with some extremely talented, creative and clever individuals, but as far as the games industry is concerned, I think I'll be resting on my (very old) laurels. Some of the new games hardware like PS3 is stunning and I'll be very interested to see what people create for it. You never know, I might start playing games again…





Greatest RETRO Game Ever

HOW ONE MAN'S NIGHTMARE BECAME GAMING HEAVEN



Release: 1992
Format: Amiga
Publisher: System 3
Developer: In-House

Its been 13 years since the release of *Putty* and it's hard to think of any platform puzzler that's come close to matching its particular brand of brain-scratching mayhem.

Sure, there have been plenty of kooky games released over the years (especially in Japan) but *Putty* is one of the craziest Western titles we've ever seen. Walking Scouse sausages, deranged moggies and bullet-spewing Terminator carrots were just a few of the bizarre enemies you faced and they gave *Putty* a wonderfully unique style. And then of course you had the hero, Putty himself – a shapeless blob that could morph into a variety of weird shapes.

It's not unusual to hear games like this described as the product of a fevered imagination, but in the case of *Putty* that really was the case.

"Phil Thornton [*Putty*'s designer and artist] would spend a lot of time in India and during one of his visits he was taken ill," reveals *Putty's* main programmer, Dan Phillips. "A combination of a high temperature and plenty of beer soon led to some very trippy hallucinations. While he was lying on his bed completely out of it he began to see bits of his room move around and absorb other bits – kind of like the way Putty did in the game."

Once Thornton had recovered and returned to the UK he immediately set to work on his new idea and approached System 3 with his bold concept. Phillips was particularly impressed with how much work Thornton had already put into the project and soon found himself onboard as lead programmer. "Phil had a pretty tight game design already planned as far as the things he wanted Putty to do," recalls Phillips. "He had already made mock-up animation sequences for pretty much every one of Putty's abilities before he had even sold the idea to System 3. And as far as I recall, we ended up using every single one of them."

With Putty's abilities having a major impact on how you could solve each level (it was just as much a puzzle game as an all-out





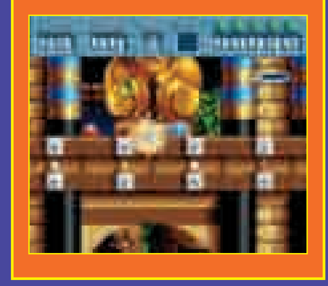
▲ Watch out for that cannon, Putty – one false move and you're liable to end up as a stain on the opposite wall.



▲ Everything about the game helped add character – even if it did seem out of place. A cat bursting through the scenery with an evil meow? Now we've seen it all…

THE BLOB SQUAD

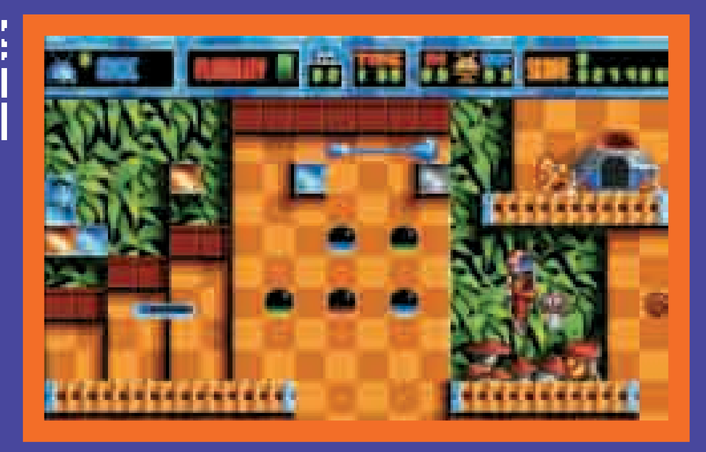
While *Putty* sequel *Putty Squad* never saw the light of day on the Amiga, it did morph across to Nintendo's SNES. It turned out to be a highly polished platformer that vastly improved on a superb title and provided Putty with even more insane abilities including the power to float like a balloon and being able to set off explosions of nitro-glycerine. System 3 had even included a nifty two-player mode that gave the already well-structured game even more scope. It's a shame that *Putty Squad* never made it to the system for which it was intended but the SNES version is a more than suitable alternative.



platformer) it was unsurprising that Thornton had put so much thought into his main character.

While the little blue blob was able to quickly shuffle around each of *Putty*'s 24 stages, he could also stretch himself to reach inaccessible platforms or cover ground more quickly. If danger threatened, the blue globule could either melt into the floor to avoid (or absorb) nearby enemies or simply punch them with a hastily created fist. Add to this the ability to morph into certain enemies or increase in size (until he popped, killing any nearby opponents) and the end result was a highly memorable character. This in part was mostly due to the sheer amount of charm that the *Putty* team had managed to bestow upon their creation.

While Putty had been beautifully animated, Phillips and co also ensured that plenty of attention was paid to the blue hero's opponents, and the on-screen actions of Putty and his enemies would often have you in stitches. This enjoyment was heightened by the ridiculous amount of voice samples that the team had added. "We didn't have any in-house musicians at the time, so it fell to Phil and myself to provide the majority of the game's SFX," reveals Phillips when asked about *Putty*'s over-the-top sound effects. "Admittedly, though, not all the effects were completely new. We 'borrowed' quite a few from several old cartoons that Phil had among his rather vast laser disc collection. These included everything that was uttered by the cat that burst through the screen, but there were plenty of other examples as well."



While there was no denying that *Putty* was a visual and aural feast, the all-important gameplay had received just as much attention – particularly where the level design was concerned. Starting off on a simple (yet intuitive) training level, new players were gently eased into *Putty*'s world of moving platforms, bizarre opponents and abstract levels and quickly realised that using Putty's skills at the right time was just as important as being able to successfully navigate platforms.

While *Putty* was first and foremost a platformer, Thornton's immaculate design meant that there was often more than one way to complete a level and skilful manipulation of Putty's abilities was often the key to success. "Phil designed all the levels and certainly did a good job on them," says Phillips. "He was able to march through each stage pretty darn quickly and would constantly playtest them as he went along. I wouldn't say there was much tweaking to ensure that the difficulty level was correct, though – we simply added more enemies as you got deeper into the game. To be honest, I'm not even sure if anyone in the office actually completed the whole game from start to finish…"

Not being able to complete their own creation wasn't the only problem that the *Putty* team faced. Phillips in particular encountered a few teething difficulties on the Amiga due to the extensive time he had spent creating Commodore 64 titles. "I expected *Putty* to be a fairly painless experience thanks to the better hardware we were using but I still faced problems, especially with the bitmap scrolling that was very CPU/Blitter intensive," he explains. "There were more colours to play around with but because the Blitter effectively stalled the CPU when you used it most of our time was spent just moving the background and plotting the enemies and Putty. It was quite a shock when we realised that it was only going to run at 30 frames per second, although we probably could have made it faster if we'd been given a better incentive."

With *Putty* becoming such a huge success – both commercially and critically – it was inevitable that a sequel was announced. Sadly, the Amiga's dwindling market meant that *Putty Squad* never got released on the Amiga, despite being completed. "The Amiga market was so dire at the time that the mastering, duplicating and manual printing would have made it prohibitive to release," says Phillips. "It's a real shame, although I'm sure I've still got a copy of it lying around somewhere."

Despite this sad end to the not-quite-a-franchise's life, *Putty* remains a fine Amiga game and one of the greatest retro games ever.



An interview with…

BEN DAGLISH

COMPOSER AND MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST BEN DAGLISH REALLY KNEW HOW TO MAKE THE SID CHIP SING. WE CAUGHT UP WITH THE MUSIC MAN TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE GLORY DAYS OF COMMODORE COMPOSITION…

Not many people can claim to be musical legends before they're 40 – some people don't even manage it while they're alive – but Ben Daglish is a hero to many retro gamers, particularly fans of the Commodore 64. Though he wrote tunes for several 8- and 16-bit systems, it's his work on the C64 that brought him fame in the early Eighties – *Trap, The Last Ninja, Thing Bounces Back* and *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* are all superb showcases for his work.

Initially working as a freelancer, Daglish joined Gremlin Graphics before becoming increasingly disillusioned with the games industry and moving into writing music for the theatre – something he still does today. Though he says he doesn't wish to return to the world of videogaming, Daglish still performs his game soundtracks at retro gaming events – including Back In Time and this year's CGE UK – with other Commodore music wizards.

We managed to track down Daglish in the Peak District, where he lives with his wife and two children, to ask about the intricacies of composing for the C64…





▲ "If you've got it, flautist" – Ben Daglish goes woodwind crazy at the C64 music event of 2002, the Back In Time concert.



▲ Could anyone have predicted that *The Last Ninja* would be as popular as it was? Not even the creators thought that'd be the case…

The interview

games™: How did you start writing music for computer games?

Ben Daglish: It was when I was asked by Tony Crowther, a school friend, to write out the notes for 'The Death March' on one of his games. After that I moved on to ripping off Jean-Michel Jarre…

g™: You're primarily known for your C64 music and are considered by many as a pioneer in that field. Does that feel good?

BD: Absolutely great, if I'm totally honest. It was a very exciting period and I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. The best thing about it, though, is receiving mails today from other musicians to whom I was an inspiration – something I can point out when I'm eventually quizzed at the Pearly Gates.

g™: Did you like your time in the industry? Trade shows must have been fun.

BD: Indeed – it was great fun strolling (well, very often stumbling, the state we were in) around with Tony, Jeff [Minter] and the rest of the gang. I'm still amused about being constantly hounded for autographs.

g™: What was so satisfying about creating music on the C64 and how did it compare to the other 8-bit machines?

BD: The SID chip made all the difference. Nothing else even came close in terms of the sounds it was able to produce – it was the first 'home synthesiser'. It was always such a disappointment to have to do the AY8912 downgrade-conversion for the Amstrad, Spectrum 128, ST and so on.

g™: Would you play games in order to get a 'feel' for them before composing?

BD: I probably managed to play around half of them. The other half were just based on a simple verbal description over the phone – "It's a shoot-'em-up with 10 levels" – and I'd just get on with it.

g™: Who were your inspirations and why did you often work by yourself?

BD: Rob [Hubbard] was the obvious C64 inspiration – hearing some of the sounds that he pulled out of the SID chip spurred many of us on to constantly rewrite our sound routines. Musically though, it was Beethoven, Fairport Convention and Weather Report – a mixed bag if ever there was one. Jean-Michel Jarre was the biggest 'synthy' composer at the time, so a lot of his work rubbed off on me as well. I didn't really ever feel the need to work with anyone else though. To quote the great Ronnie Hazlehurst, "Never become an arranger – you'll turn into a hermit". So true…

g™: Did you enjoy collaborating with Rob Hubbard on *Auf Wiedersehen Monty*?

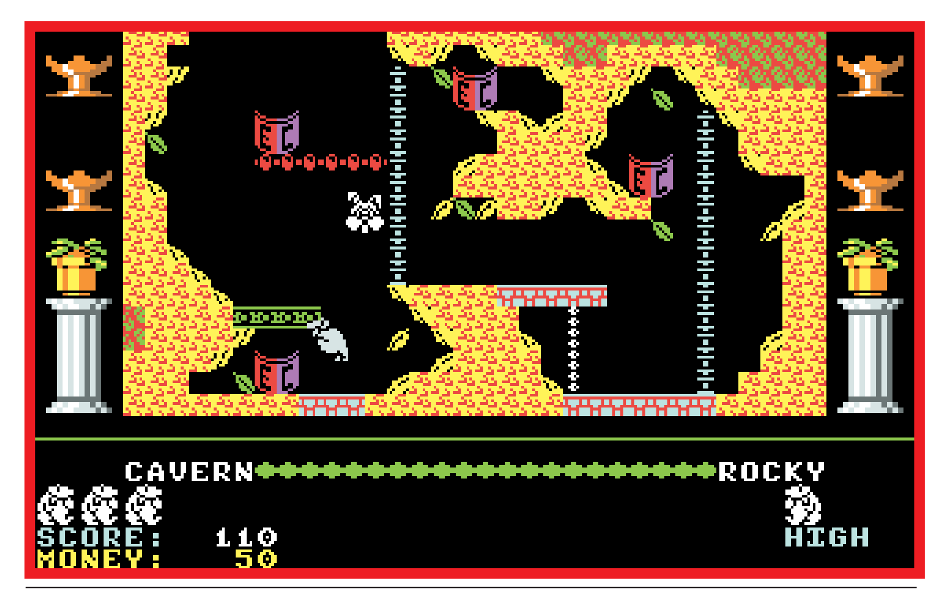
BD: It was marvellous fun. Rob had written the original *Monty* music, and although I was the in-house composer for Gremlin at the time we thought it would be nice to invite him along to write on the sequel as well. We basically spent two days in my studio getting stoned and jamming, then Rob hid in a corner with his

FINDING THE MUSE

Over the years, eager gamers have always wondered where Daglish found the inspiration for his music, especially with regards to titles like *The Last Ninja*. As Daglish explains, though, the answer often disappoints them, as the whole process is difficult to explain. "To be honest, the 'inspiration' thing is impossible – it really is like asking a writer 'Where do you get your ideas?'," he says. "I look, I think, I hum, then out it comes. I've no idea where it actually comes from; it's just there. The same applies for the actual composing process – I just write notes until it sounds right and I'm happy with the final product.

"Most of the time, I just sat in a room and wrote the tunes – not a lot more to it than that. Any memorable ones [for me] usually aren't the most memorable as far as the audience are concerned – I had no idea, for instance, with *The Last Ninja* when I was writing it that it would take off in the way that it did. If the process was memorable, it's usually because it was a hard one, or because something completely unrelated happened to spur the memory."

"I'M STILL AMUSED ABOUT BEING HOUNDED FOR AUTOGRAPHS"



▲ Surreal game, even more surreal music – some of the tunes accompanying Monty's adventures still bring back memories today.

An interview with…

super-secret-player-code and programmed all the notes in.

gTM: Did it take very long to compose your music?

BD: To be honest, the composition side was usually very quick – I'd whistle or scribble away for a couple of hours, then spend a few days actually doing the arranging and programming.

gTM: Were there ever projects you weren't satisfied with?

BD: Many, I'm sure – some tunes were knocked off and shipped out in less than a day so they could have easily been improved. Don't expect me to start remembering names, though – it was all a very long time ago.

gTM: How did you find the transition to the 16-bit computers?

BD: I just turned around and there they were… Actually, the only one worthy of mention was the Amiga – the ST just had the same bog-standard Yamaha AY chip as everything else (although I did use it for sequencing). Writing for the Amiga was okay, but it was never as much 'fun' as for the C64 because it was just too easy – sample the sound you wanted, then slap it in – there was just nothing to it.

gTM: Why did you and Tony Crowther decide to set up W.E.M.U.S.I.C. (We Make Use Of Sound In Computers) and what do you feel was the company's high point?

BD: We set it up purely to market the music we were doing – Tony wrote the players, and I did the dots. Our high point was probably the collaborative aspect – although Tony wasn't really a composer at the time (though he subsequently wrote some nice stuff), he was a great critic with a good ear, and spurred me on.

gTM: How did you find running your own company?

BD: To be honest, I've never really enjoyed it – I'm a hippy, not a businessman.

> **"I DIDN'T REALLY ENJOY RUNNING A COMPANY – I'M A HIPPY NOT A BUSINESSMAN"**

gTM: And why did you and Tony decide to part ways?

BD: It was a combination of things. The player routine had got quite stable so I was pretty much writing on my own by then while Tony concentrated on writing games, and then I got offered the full-time post with Gremlin, leaving no time for freelance work.

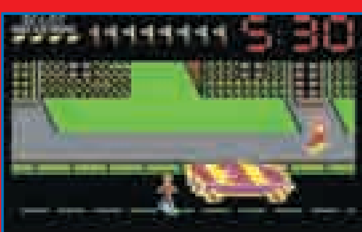
gTM: Tell us a little more about joining Gremlin Graphics.

BD: Tony was one of the original founders of Gremlin Graphics, and so I started working with them on a freelance basis at first. He eventually 'moved on' (there's a long story there which isn't mine to tell, but suffice to say I was extremely surprised to find that Gremlin are often used as a model in university business courses), but I carried on writing for them, especially as they were based, as was I, in Sheffield.

gTM: How did you find the transition from freelancer to working in-house with Gremlin?

BD: Quite bizarre, actually – writing music nine to five came as quite a shock. The money was nice, and so were the toys they bought for me, but to be honest it was the beginning of the end.



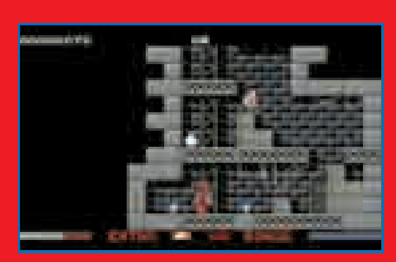




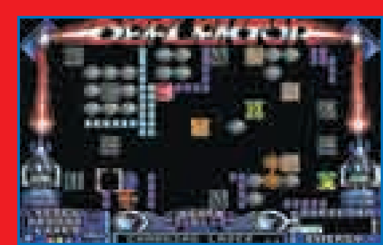
SOFTOGRAPHY

While the talented Mr Daglish has worked on a vast number of different formats and titles – way too many to list here – he's best remembered for his Commodore 64 tunes. With this in mind, here's our top 20 Daglish C64 soundtracks. Don't agree with us? Write and let us know…

Auf Wiedersehen Monty	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Avenger	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Blasteroids	1989	Image Works
Bobby Bearing	1986	The Edge
Chubby Gristle	1988	Grandslam
Cobra	1986	Ocean
Death Wish III	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Deflektor	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Gauntlet	1986	US Gold
H.A.T.E.	1989	Gremlin Graphics
Jack The Nipper	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Krakout	1987	Gremlin Graphics
The Last Ninja	1987	System 3
Pac-Mania	1988	Grandslam
SkateRock	1986	Bubble Bus
Super Cars	1991	Gremlin Graphics
Switchblade	1991	Gremlin Graphics
Thing Bounces Back	1987	Gremlin Graphics
Trap	1986	Alligata Software
Way Of The Tiger	1986	Gremlin Graphics







g™: What prompted your decision to leave the games industry?

BD: I left when it became 'just another industry'. When I started, it was 14-year-olds writing games in their bedrooms for the fun of it. By the time I left, it had become shits-in-suits wandering around talking about 'shipping boxes' with no idea of actually what was in them – the products were a logo and a marketing concept as far as they were concerned.

g™: Even today your music has a massive following and remains extremely popular. How do you feel about this?

BD: Mixed. It's strange listening back now to things that I wrote 20 years ago, having (I hope) progressed musically, but they're still recognisable as being mine. The remix scene now is great – some pieces are now sounding how I originally envisioned them in the scribbly-composey stage, before I had to cut them down to just three voices. It's marvellous that people are still listening to them, and there are still many tunes that I'm proud of, having obviously passed a 20-year 'old grey whistle test'.

g™: You mentioned the remix scene – any particular favourites?

BD: The remix scene is great – I only wish that they sold more so that I could get some royalties in. My favourite is Reyn Ouwehand's *Deflektor* – that's basically the arrangement we play in SID80s [Stuck In D'80s, a live band formed by Daglish, Mark Knight, Marcel Donné, Reyn Ouwehand and Andreas Wallstrom].

g™: How did the Back In Time concerts come about?



▲ The idea of *Pac-Man* in more than two dimensions might have seemed like heresy to some, but you can't deny the genius of the music.

BD: It's all down to Chris Abbott, hero of this parish. Chris publishes my work (as well as Rob's, Dave Whittaker's and just about everybody else you've ever heard of), and he was determined to get us out of the house and in front of the public.

g™: How has the reception been and are there plans to play this year?

BD: The reception has been marvellous – you can judge for yourself when the DVD eventually comes out. It's having a bit of a break at the moment – it's very difficult to pull off financially, but myself, Mark Knight (madfiddler) and maybe Jon Hare are doing a few gigs this year at assorted retro conventions around the country and we're definitely attending this year's CGE UK.

g™: You're obviously a talented musician; how many instruments can you play?



BD: I wouldn't really like to give a number – it's a lot, though. I started on whistle and harmonica when I was about five or six, did cornet for a while and then played oboe up to about grade five or six. I then moved onto orchestral percussion (my main study for many years), which obviously included stuff like timpani and xylophone. I'm currently playing a lot of guitar, flute, whistle, piano and (I think my favourite, believe it or not) WX5 wind-controller. I probably own upwards of 50 different types of instruments (30-odd whistles alone), ranging from sitar to accordian and ocarina, and on occasion have a tinkle on them all (not, I hasten to add, all at the same time, though Roy Castle's record is one that I intend to go for at some point).

g™: You now write music for plays, which is a world away from the videogames industry. How did this change come about?

BD: It was mainly due to my ex-partner, who is a theatre director, and she got me to write for some of her productions. Friends of hers liked my work, asked me to do more, and it simply grew from there.

g™: How do you like to spend your spare time?

BD: Reading, writing, playing in various bands, jazzing, smoking, surfing (internet, not water) and playing Ultimate Frisbee. Luckily, I've managed to interest the kids in much the same, so I'm not being neglectful.

g™: What are your plans for the future?

BD: I'm the worst planner in the world, so I really try not to think about it. Things seem to just crop up, and I'm just happy to go along with the flow…

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

THE FIRST LUCKY COLLECTOR TO FEATURE IN OUR NEW-LOOK ULTIMATE COLLECTION IS SEAN SMITH, A HOUSING CO-ORDINATOR FROM SOUTHAMPTON. WHEN HE'S NOT PUTTING A ROOF OVER PEOPLE'S HEADS, SEAN ENJOYS NOTHING MORE THAN RUMMAGING AROUND SECOND-HAND SHOPS AND PICKING UP THE ODD BARGAIN OR TWO…



Q) So how long have you been collecting games?
I follow the collecting 'career route' of most of the people who have appeared in this section. From my youth I went through all of the major consoles and home computers and generally traded my consoles and games for more up-to-date stuff as the years went on, due to my then lack of funds. I wasn't in a position to really begin collecting per se until around two years ago, when my better half and I moved in together and I had a settled job.

Q) How did your interest in collecting come about?
At a car boot sale I picked up a Mega Drive for a few quid along with some excellent games I remembered playing as a nipper. After playing the games for a while I realised that, a few titles aside, the retro consoles had much more to offer me than the current generation. Within weeks, I had picked up a NES and a SNES, and then my wife and I bought a PC as a wedding present. It was at that point I discovered eBay…

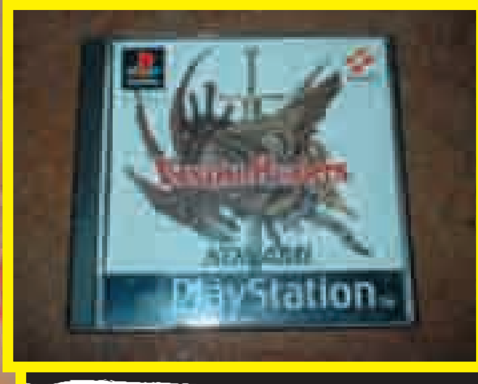
Q) So has your hobby eaten into your finances?
Not really – the most I've ever spent on a retro title was about £25 for my Japanese *Ikaruga*. I pick up most of my stuff from car boot sales, second-hand game shops, eBay and the various forums I belong to. Unless you're buying mega rare stuff, like desirable Neo-Geo AES titles, you can pick up most titles relatively cheaply. Despite my prudent nature, I did recently spend over £250 on a consolised Neo-Geo MVS system, but that was a bargain considering the games that came with it.

Q) Tell us a little more about your Neo-Geo collection.
Ever since I was a youngster, SNK's 16-bit arcade hardware was the seemingly unattainable Holy Grail of console gaming. I can remember playing Neo-Geo arcade cabinets when I went on holiday to Cherbourg and desperately wanting one. Recently the opportunity to buy an MVS system arose, and after much deliberation (and the co-operation of my lovely wife), I went ahead and bought the beautiful consolised unit I now own. Nothing beats having arcade-perfect versions of *Metal Slug*, *King Of Fighters* and *The Last Blade* on your own TV. In today's era of ultra-realistic, violent gaming it's a pure, unadulterated pleasure to play colourful, 2D arcade games in their original form – I get to relive my childhood dream every time I switch it on.

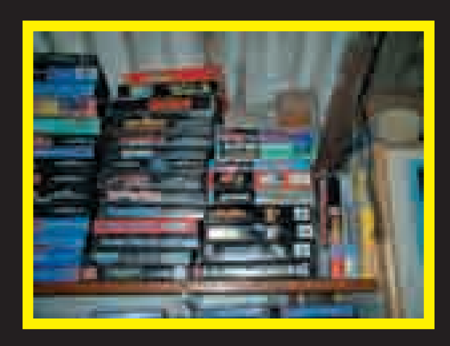
Q) So is the Neo your most prized possession? If not, what is?
That's an extremely difficult question to answer,



▼ The tools of any self-respecting gamer's trade – although ours look slightly more scratched.

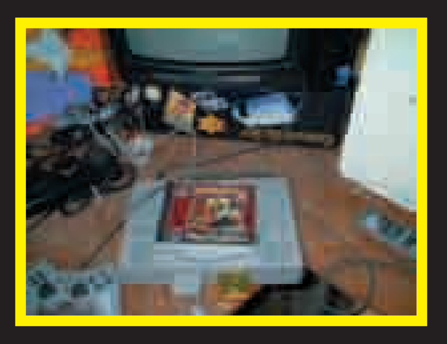


▼ A mint-in-the-box PSone *Vandal Hearts* – a rarity in this day and age. And yes, it makes our mouths water as well.



▼ Clearly, the man has some kind of fighting game fetish – although looking at him, we wouldn't want to take him on in a scrap…





so I'm going to cheat and say my garage. Every time I walk into it I still get a buzz when I see all my gaming kit there. If you had to pin me down to a particular item, then at a push I'd probably have to go with my *Metal Slug X* MVS cart – probably the one game I couldn't live without.

Q) Tell us more about where you get your games from?

Well, car boot sales, independent game shops, second-hand places and charity shops can all be a source for unexpected game bargains. Larger retailers such as Game and Gamestation also sell retro titles, often at bargain-tastic prices. Any collector or retro fan should be joining forums too as they're great places to trade with like-minded individuals. eBay is a little more fraught, but there are still bargains to be had. It's also worth taking advantage of the exchange rate and buying from the States and beyond.

Q) You've got an impressive Capcom collection – what's the appeal?

The first arcade game I remember playing was Capcom's awesome *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. After that I moved onto titles such as *Side Arms*, *Black Tiger*, *Captain Commando* and *Final Fight*. To me, Capcom always seemed to produce the most charming games that stood out from the rest of the arcade. While I owned many Capcom conversions on my C64 I went completely bonkers when the SNES arrived and I got to play *Street Fighter II*. I also lapped up the likes of *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, *Demon's Crest* and *Area 88*, which were all (and still are) brilliant games. In terms of my current retro collection, picking up *Capcom Generations* on the PSX a few years ago and rediscovering the brilliance of the many 2D fighters on the PSX and Dreamcast has created an obsession to purchase anything Capcom related – I only need a few titles now.

Q) Ever found a real bargain?

Many times! I picked up *Shining Force* on the Mega Drive for just £2.50 at a car boot sale, and just a few weeks later bagged a copy of *Vandal Hearts* for 50p less at the same site. I've accumulated most of my PSX collection for no more than £2.99 each and *Devil Dice* for £4.95 was an absolute steal. However, my best bargain ever would have to be a copy of *Primal Rage* for the Sega 32X that I picked up for just £6.99. I started shaking and almost hyperventilated when I saw it, as I knew the last known copy to go up for sale on eBay had topped the £300 mark.

Q) Do you collect games as an investment, or do you buy to play?

A bit of both really. I have bought some titles that I am not a huge fan of but recognise their worth in investment terms. I've always told my wife that if we were ever in financial trouble then I would happily sell my games if it meant looking after my family. That still applies, and therefore I'll continue to buy certain items even if I know that I'll rarely play them. If I am buying to play, then I'll try and take the cheapest possible option. Examples of this would be picking up cart-only copies of *Chrono Trigger* and *Secret Of Mana*, or opting for the American release of *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*.

Q) Would you turn down a rare title if it wasn't in mint condition?

It depends. I can live with a cracked or tatty box, as nine times out of ten you can replace this at a later date. I wouldn't spend a large amount of money on a title if, for example, it was missing the instructions or the disc was scratched. But as I mentioned, if I want to play a game, then the condition matters very little. I think the only time I would be hacked off over the condition of an item would be if I were sold something over the internet that didn't arrive in the condition in which it was advertised. But I don't think that's unique to me, or even to game collecting.

Q) What do your family think of your collection?

Fortunately, my wife, Kerry, is absolutely brilliant about it. She knows I don't spend much money on games, and I don't spend an inordinate amount of time playing them either. I've avoided the obsessive, anal side of collecting and do it for the sheer joy and pleasure the games bring me. Encouragingly, my missus will also have a go on some of my games; she's a fan of *Super Mario Kart*, *Beatmania* and *Bust A Groove*. I even tried to convert her to the beauty of *Metal Slug* but she wasn't impressed… Oliver, my seven-year-old stepson, loves games himself, and while he'll occasionally have the odd game of *Bomberman* or *Gunstar Heroes* he's usually too busy on his own PSone or Dreamcast. That said, my wife and I try to ensure he doesn't spend too long on his games, and I can't see our recent arrival – three-month-old baby Grace – showing an interest any time soon!





▼ Even retro collectors have to have new games too. Some of them are quite good, apparently.



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

FLYING FISH FRENZY

Dear games™

I read with fascination in issue 33 of **games™** Retro about the Konami DS and GBA bonus for the two recently released *Goemon* DS and GBA titles. Being able to unlock *Space Manbow* is a great idea, as the original MSX game was a fun and challenging shoot-'em-up.

What I want to mention is that Konami did a similar thing for MSX owners, and the end result was just as good. If you had an MSX with two cartridge slots (most of them did) and placed *Nemesis 2* in the first slot and *Penguin Adventure* in the second, you ended up with a *Nemesis 2/Parodius* hybrid complete with a flying penguin that shoots fish! If you don't have access to a MSX then you can use an emulator – it works just as well.

Ali Alsawaf

Looks like we're not the only ones looking forward to playing *Space Manbow* again, especially as Konami has been generous enough to provide a second game as well. Once we've unlocked them we'll give you a little more information, but at the moment we're still waiting for our bloody copy of *Kessakusen! Ganbere Goemon 1+2* to turn up…



Unlockable games – they make it like Christmas every day. Sort of.

RASH REVOLUTION?

Dear games™

What's to stop some group of people – let's call them, say, gamers – from using the fact that the Nintendo Revolution can play old content via a download service but instead abuse it in order to get their ROMs for free? Because Nintendo is going to be charging for games, what's to stop people from simply downloading them via some add-on device like a memory card or PC and then uploading it into the internal memory of the console?

While I love the sound of the Revolution, I can't help but think that Nintendo is shooting itself in the foot by releasing a machine that's basically built around emulation.

Steven Clark

We wouldn't worry too much. While it's inevitable that the Revolution could well get hacked at some point in the future, it's unlikely to happen immediately. Nintendo is well aware of the importance of combating piracy and it's likely to have very strong encryption set in place. Also, the Revolution is hardly going to be based around emulation – it's just an attractive way of making it more appealing to the buying public.

DREAMCAST DAME

Dear games™

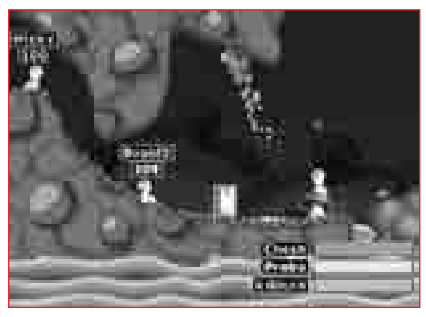
I just wanted to mention that I'm a new buyer of your magazine and was attracted by the nice, chunky retro section and, in particular, the fabulous Dizzy feature that was inside [issue 33].

Anyway, I would first of all like to thank you for your article on Dreamcast games in your buyers' guide. The Dreamcast was a seriously underrated console and it should have booted the competition out of the water. I much lament its demise and to this day spend too much time playing *Worms Armegeddon* on it with my mates – a version with I consider superior to most other console versions of *Worms*, especially the dire *Worms 3D*.

I also wanted to comment on Anastasia Demi's letter in issue 33 about female gamers not being taken seriously by the hardcore guys. It's a vicious stereotype that assumes girls can't possibly know as much about games as guys. It's quite sad, really, and very frustrating at times. Glad to see you're making some effort at busting this assumption.

Rebecca Duty

Welcome aboard, Rebecca. If you're a big fan of 2D *Worms* then you may be interested to hear that portable versions will be appearing for both the DS and PSP by the end of the year. That may well be able to prise you away from your beloved Dreamcast…



Those worms still look so much better in two dimensions.







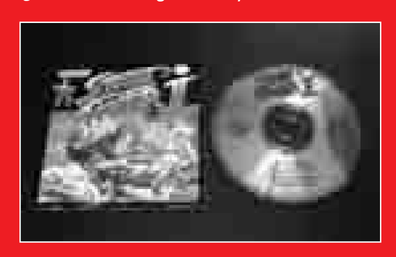


STAR LETTER

Dear games™
In response to your request for a *Street Fighter II* soundtrack CD in issue 34, I can confirm that such a CD does exist – I've enclosed a picture of it.

The CD was given away free with an issue of *Nintendo Magazine System* in the early Nineties. It features all the main tunes plus a collection of sound effects and grunts from the grandaddy of all beat-'em-ups. As for getting hold of one, I'd suggest eBay, since my current lack of cash may force me into selling mine in the near future.

Congrats on producing the best magazine I've read since the days of *Total* (anyone remember that?).
Aled Evans



Cheers for the info, Aled. Now we've seen your picture we can actually remember the disc – we're pretty sure we must have one hidden up in the attic somewhere. Have this month's Star Letter for digging up this fine specimen of retro music. And if you're so strapped for cash you might have to sell this *SFII* rarity it sounds like you could do with a free game…

HOW NEW IS TOO NEW?

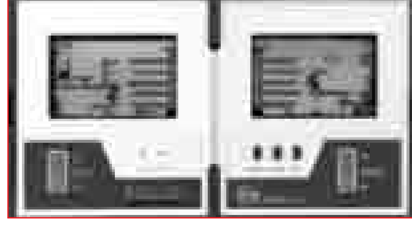
Dear games™
Thank you for the excellent Retro section that keeps me clued up on my favourite scene every month. I was wondering what you considered to be 'retro' at the moment. Given that the next generation of consoles is looming, which machines are due to enter the retro 'canon' in the near future? I hear people discussing the ill-fated Dreamcast as a retro machine – but they are still making games for it!

What's **games™**'s stance on this issue? Indeed, when will the PS2 and co stop being current and fall into the world of retro?
Don Jensen

Ah, the good old 'what is retro?' debate. It's hard to reach a definitive answer to that question because retro means something different to each person. While there are still games being made for the Dreamcast, the majority of casual gamers consider it to be a dead machine so it now features in the retro section. The PlayStation is trickier to define as it's still available in UK stores and games are still released for it. On the other hand, it's part of an era that included the Saturn and N64 (both long dead), which we now consider retro. We'd say it's going to be a good few years before the PlayStation2 and Xbox are considered antiques though. And now our heads hurt.

GAME AND WHAT?

Dear games™
I really loved Game & Watch when I was a young 'un. But there's one that I used to have that I can't find anywhere. I can't even remember its name, I'm afraid. It had two screens; one on the left and one on the right, one of them had Mario in and the other, his brother. The aim of the game was to send parcels from one screen to the other. Please can you help? What's it called, and where can I find it?
Derek Macintosh



There you go – *Mario Bros*. Package-pushing fun on two screens.

That's an easy one to answer; it was called *Mario Bros* and damn good fun it was too. The best place to find a copy is on dedicated auction sites such as www.ebay.co.uk and www.videogameauctions.com. Otherwise you may get lucky and find one in a local Gamestation or independent store.

RETRO RADIO

Dear games™
Regarding Nsabasi Etteh's letter about retro game music [issue 34], readers might want to check out www.gamingfm.com as it features a massive variety of game soundtracks to listen to.

It's possible to stream all the tunes and there are a total of four different channels that cover 16-bit music, 32-bit music and beyond, and even PC titles. I've had a look and there are a few *Street Fighter II* tracks on there. A word of warning though: listening may cause high levels of nostalgia...
Peter Hopkins

Thanks, Peter – we'd never heard of GamingFM but it's now become a permanent fixture in the office. Just listening to the opening strains of *Skies Of Arcadia* was enough to get us hankering after the game itself. Of course, the non-retro fans in the office have now bought earplugs…







It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-30



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£70-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£50-100
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£80-180
Super Grafx	£200-300



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£10-170 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-40
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-30
Mega Drive	£5-20
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to go for. Hopefully, we can help.

Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, these are subject to change, so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). This month we're taking a look at some of the more desirable Japanese Saturn titles.



Metal Slug

Developer: SNK
Estimated Price: £40-65 (more with RAM cartridge)

Granted, there's a fair amount of slowdown in the Saturn version of *Metal Slug*, but it's still an amazing conversion. Why pay up to £1,000 for the AES version when you can have this beauty for a fraction of the price? Loading times are a bit of a drag and finding the game with a RAM Cartridge can be a pain, but if you're after a superb Neo-Geo conversion on the Saturn then this is one of the best.



Bubble Symphony

Developer: Taito/Ving
Estimated Price: £30-55

Like many Saturn titles, *Bubble Symphony* has maintained a constant price on eBay for as long as we can remember. Fortunately, it's a price that's fair. While it features similar elements to *Bubble Bobble*, it's been enhanced with new power-ups, new dinosaurs and some superb, bouncy tunes. If you're a fan of the original game but found it all rather basic, *Bubble Symphony* should be able to fulfil all your retro needs.



Street Fighter Zero 3

Developer: Capcom
Estimated Price: £40-70 (more with RAM cartridge)

Only a year ago you could get Capcom's superb fighter for under £40 and that was with a 4Mb RAM Cart. However, its price has been climbing and we've seen a mint copy sell for over £100. Sure, you can buy the PAL version on the Dreamcast for £20, but it feels inferior to the Saturn outing. Add to that the Saturn's superb joypads and this is the obvious choice.



Elevator Action Returns

Developer: Taito
Estimated Price: £30-65

It may have taken Taito 11 years to come up with a sequel to the popular *Elevator Action*, but it was worth the wait. Stylish visuals, lashings of ultra-violence and multiple characters definitely make this a worthy follow-up. It's also one of the bloodiest Saturn games we've played, so if you're looking for an intense yet satisfying shooter, this should fulfil all your requirements.



Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru

Developer:
Estimated Price: £180-220

Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru's stupidly low print run means its price is always going to distance it from all but the most hardcore Saturn owners. And that's a shame as not only is it a thoroughly enjoyable game, it's also one of the few titles to really show off the Saturn's graphical abilities. With recent copies on eBay pushing close to the £250 mark, imagine how shocked we were to see someone on a forum sell their copy for just £120…



X-Men Vs Street Fighter

Developer: Capcom
Estimated Price: £15-25 (more with RAM cartridge)

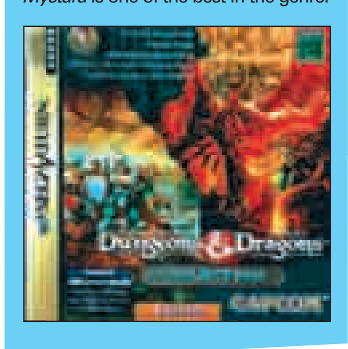
It was Capcom's stunning conversion of its hit arcade game that made PAL Saturn owners first consider importing. A UK release was planned but it was cancelled at the last minute. Luckily, the game's easy to find and can be bought for peanuts. If you're looking for an introduction to the *Vs* series and Capcom fighters in general, then *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* is the perfect place to start.



Dungeons & Dragons Collection

Developer: Capcom
Estimated Price: £35-80 (more with RAM cartridge)

While the Saturn conversions of *Tower Of Doom* and *Shadow Of Mystara* are hardly arcade perfect the double pack is highly desirable. Like many Capcom titles the RAM cart version is more expensive, but if you've got a cart floating about and can endure the loading times then track this down. Capcom scrolling fighters are always worthy of merit, and *Shadows Of Mystara* is one of the best in the genre.



Akumajou Dracula X: Gekka No Yasoukyoku

Developer: Konami
Estimated Price: £40-70

Despite the fact that it has more slowdown than the PlayStation version, *Gekka No Yasoukyoku* (or *Nocturne In The Moonlight*) remains a worthy Saturn purchase and an interesting curio for *Castlevania* fans. Two new locations and the ability to play as Maria and Richter at the beginning of the game are just a few of the treats to discover; and wait until you hear the remixed music…



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



NAMCO X CAPCOM

And lo, the fanboys did rejoice when Namco and Capcom filled a single game with virtually every one of their characters. True, the fighting system here is incredibly detailed and deep, but that doesn't excuse the rest of the game from being rather vapid.



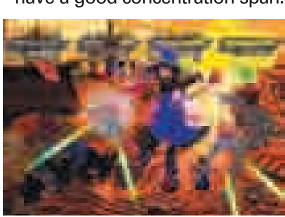
STELLA DEUS

This, on the other hand, has some significant meat on its RPG bones, or at least fat created through the inevitable process of level grinding. That said, Atlus' latest release is one that offers RPG fans something satisfying, if rather difficult at times.



GUILTY GEAR ISUKA

Three words to describe Sammy's four-player brawler – messy but fun. Keeping track of the frantic action isn't exactly easy (it gets ridiculously crazy all too quickly) but that isn't to say it's not enjoyable; you just have to have a good concentration span.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

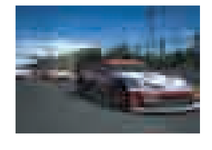
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	Hard as nails but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
God Of War	Sony	In-House	Sony's answer to *Devil May Cry* is a godly delight
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Gitaroo Man	THQ	Koei	The genuine thing of rhythm-action beauty
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House	Flawed genius, but genius nevertheless
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	The original still reigns for style and substance.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Gran Turismo 4
The purist's choice as far as realistic racing titles go, offering so many cars it makes our brains hurt.



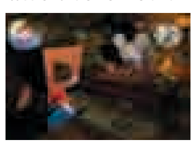
Burnout 3: Takedown
Fast, furious and frantic – this redefines arcade racing. If you're not with us, you're just mangled wreckage in the way.



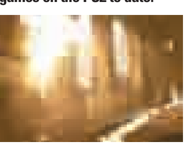
POP: Sands Of Time
As elegant and refined as platform adventures come, Ubisoft's revitalisation of the franchise is a real winner.



Gregory Horror Show
Quirky with a capital 'uirky', Capcom's weird and wacky game isn't easy to find but the hunt is well worth it.



Ico
Oh *Ico*, how do we love thee? Let us count the ways… Undoubtedly one of the best games on the PS2 to date.











XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the upcoming Xbox 360, Microsoft has pledged to support the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House	No *GT4* comparisions – just a solid Xbox racing game
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	And about time too – a better version in almost every way
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine	Wonderfully unique and enjoyable, if a little short
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
RalliSport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House	The best *Splinter Cell* yet, thanks to the co-op mode
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	The greatest collection of fighting games ever? Oh, hell yes
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	An infinitely expanding universe of online blasting action

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

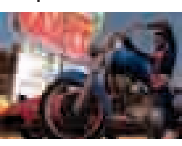
Fable
Okay, so it wasn't quite as epic as Peter Molyneux led us to believe, but that doesn't make it any less enjoyable.



Pro Evolution Soccer 4
Pure football entertainment *and* the inclusion of Xbox Live? It's like we've died and gone to 11-a-side heaven.



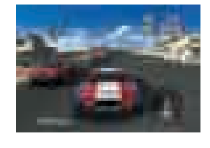
GTA: San Andreas
The conversion's slightly disappointing but the actual game is still hugely deserving of the praise it has received.



Psychonauts
It might look like just another platformer but Tim Schafer's creation is one that'll have you permanently smiling.



Forza Motorsport
A solid racer for a very solid console – just what the fans asked for. Just don't mention *GT4*, eh?

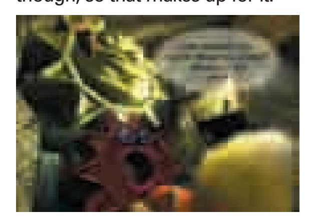


games™ VIEWPOINT



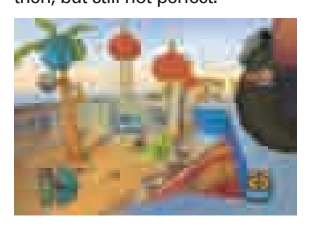
CONKER: LIVE & RELOADED

Despite our rose-tinted glasses, it's not hard to see that *Conker* isn't as great as we remember it, but then maybe we've grown up since it first came out. The multiplayer side is enjoyable though, so that makes up for it.



WORMS 4: MAYHEM

Dammit, Team 17 – we always have failed, and possibly always will, to agree with the decison to move *Worms* into 3D. True, the preservation of the series' humour at least kept us happy, but it's just not the same. Fun then, but still not perfect.



ADVENT RISING

Supposedly, making bad videogames isn't a crime against humanity… although *Advent Rising* comes pretty damn close. It's such a mess we don't know where to begin – we can only plead that Vivendi decides not to release it over here after all.



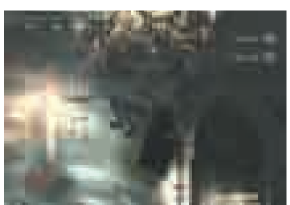
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



BATMAN BEGINS

Oh lordy. On the plus side, EA's licence-fest isn't nearly as bad as *Catwoman* but it's just not interesting or original enough to put it anywhere above mediocre. It's just so damn boring. And don't even get us started on the stealth argument.



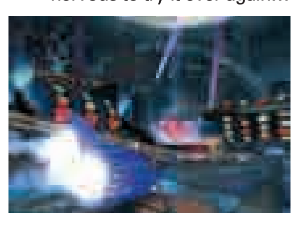
KILLER7

In our eyes, this is a risk that's paid off for Capcom. *killer7* looks bizarre but it's an incredible experience from start to finish. Our only concern is that only a minority of people will 'get it' and it'll end up in bargain bins for £20 in a few weeks' time.



F-ZERO GX

It was almost enough to make us cry – there we were, enjoying our new plasma screen TV and playing Sega's high-speed racer in glorious progressive scan when… bang! One dead screen, up in smoke. Now it's fixed, we're nervous to try it ever again…





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
WarioWare: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	Far better than its clueless detractors will have you believe

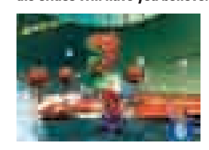
WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Animal Crossing
How many console games can you say end up taking up over a year of your life? Not many besides this, we'll bet.

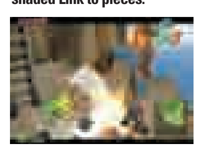
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour
The Nintendo equivalent of *Hot Shots Golf*, there's nothing quite like ruining a good walk with Mario and his friends.



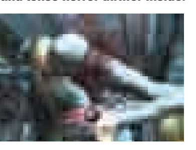
Super Mario Sunshine
Try revisiting Mario's main GameCube adventure and you'll discover that it's far better than the critics will have you believe.



LOZ: The Wind Waker
Likewise, *Wind Waker* is also a great *Zelda* title despite its detractors – we love cel-shaded Link to pieces.



Resident Evil 4
If you can manage to track down a copy (and it's still difficult), you'll find a gripping and tense horror thriller inside.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



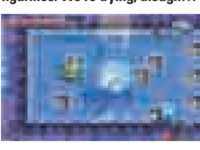
Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

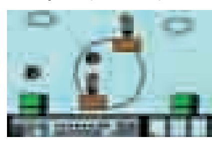
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

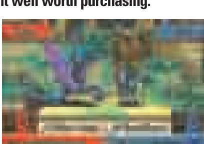
LOZ: The Minish Cap
Many months down the line and we still haven't fused all those Kinstones, or won all the figurines. We're trying, though…



WarioWare: Twisted!
A game that challenges your dexterity as well as your mind – the perfect mix for Nintendo's madcap mini-game menagerie.



Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones
More of the same from the brilliant minds at Intelligent Systems, but it's still different enough to make it well worth purchasing.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



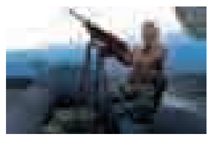
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

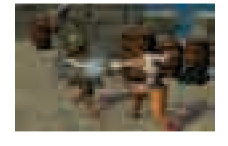
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	EA	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Battlefield 2
Improves on the original games in every way, without actually changing all that much. Strange how that always happens for EA…



Sid Meier's Pirates!
A great attempt at bringing a life on the ocean wave to the PC, especially since the Xbox version is somewhat inferior.



City Of Heroes
With the release of *City Of Villains* fast approaching, now would be the time to build up those superpowers of yours.




eMag

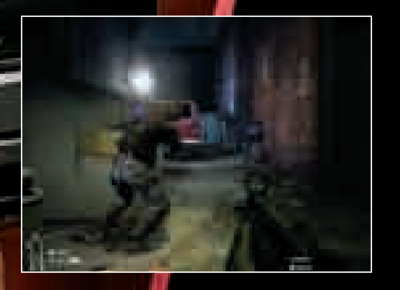
PLAY TO WIN

COME JOIN THE GAMES™ ONLINE GAMING COMMUNITY – WE'VE LAID ON EVERYTHING YOU'LL NEED TO ENJOY SOME OF THE VERY BEST PC MULTIPLAYER TITLES AROUND

Clearly, creating the **games**™ PC gaming servers (with help from our friends at Jolt Online Gaming) was a great idea – the servers haven't stopped buzzing since we brought them online, so you're obviously loving what you see. With *Battlefield 2* proving to be a stunning sequel, we've added that to the mix of titles on offer; our 64-player server offers fast-paced action with no lag, so hopefully we can expect to see you on there in the very near future. Admittedly, we'll be looking at you through our sights, but hey…

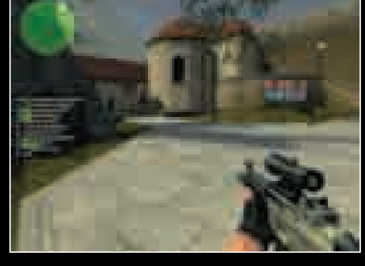
SWAT 4

Making a new entry onto **gamesTM01** is Vivendi's cop-busting FPS *SWAT 4*. We've set up some games of Barricaded Suspects (that's Team Deathmatch, to those who don't know), although Co-op mode will also be making an appearance.



COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

Still reigning supreme on the popularity list it's *Counter-Strike: Source* on **gamesTM02**, and to be honest, we can't blame you. Particularly since Valve introduced the new levels.

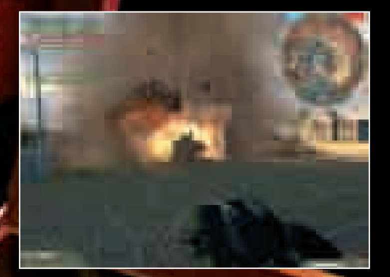


PAINKILLER

The same old game as before on **gamesTM03**? Well, not quite. Yes, we've kept *Painkiller* but we've also installed the new PK++ mod to keep things interesting. The pain level is still just as high as it ever was though…

BATTLEFIELD 2

It shouldn't surprise you to learn that **gamesTM04** now plays host to our current favourite online game – just search for 213.208.119.130 in the game's IP browser, using '**crabbattle**' as your password to enlist in our ranks.



JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

No change here, simply because you seem to be loving it so much. Advance And Secure remains the game on **gamesTM05**, so get out there and crack some skulls in the jungle, soldier.





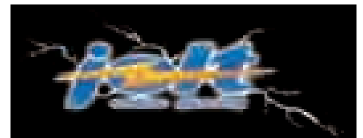
Getting onto the **games**™ servers couldn't be easier – simply call up the available server list within any of the above games, find the relevant **games**™ gaming server and, providing the server isn't already full, click to enter. Our servers are still available to all with no restrictions and are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you have any problems or experience difficulty logging into the servers, just drop us a line at gamestm@paragon.co.uk, making sure that the words '**games**™ servers' are displayed clearly in the subject heading of your email.

JOLT ONLINE

The official **games**™ servers are provided by Jolt Online Gaming, the number-one gaming server provider in Europe. Jolt's servers have been seen by many as the benchmark in online gaming performance in Europe since 1999.

Jolt believes that online gaming is about more than just logging on to a random game server and playing with strangers. By fostering a strong relationship with its community and giving gamers places to hang out, Jolt has become host to one of the largest and most vibrant gaming communities in the world – you can join today by visiting http://forums.jolt.co.uk

Jolt also offers a variety of personalised game server packages catering for everyone from small clans looking for a private practice ground to large clans and organisations who want the prestige of their own branded and totally dedicated server boxes running multiple public game sessions with integrated admin tools, anti-cheat software and access to a dedicated support team. With prices starting at £12 a month, Jolt's servers are affordable to all. For more information visit www.jolt.co.uk



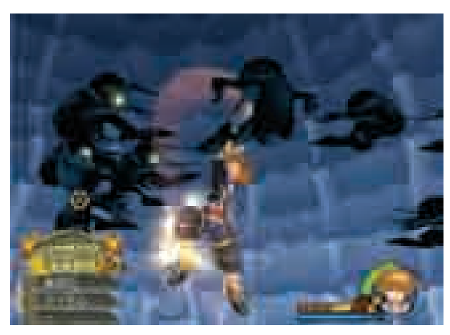


And so, nearly a year after the more dedicated among us turned on our Japanese import machines, the PSP is out in the UK. games™ gives you the lowdown on every launch title, right here next issue.

SONY PSP: LAUNCH SPECIAL



NEXT MONTH

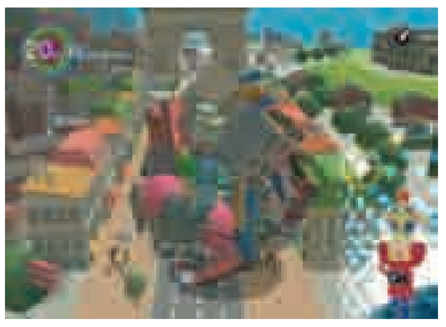


You don't have to like Donald Duck and Goofy to appreciate the loveliness of *Kingdom Hearts II*.

MORE… PREVIEWS

You want games? You can't handle the games. Unless you happen to read the well-travelled magazine that is **games™**, of course. Japan? That'll be *Kingdom Hearts II*, then. San Francicso? EA's hulking winter line-up. Lyon, Madison and London? *Test Drive Unlimited*, *Prey* and *Without Warning*. And that's just the tip of the preview-covered iceburg…

"IGNORE THE DISNEY LABEL – KINGDOM HEARTS II IS AS DARK AS AN RPG GETS"

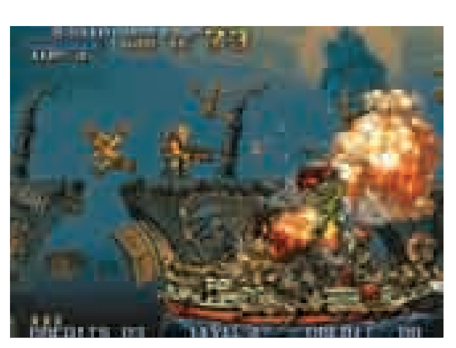


Apparently, everybody loves *Katamari Damacy* – not just us. That's rather fortunate, isn't it?

MORE… REVIEWS

Believe it or not, but the games keep coming – even if it is a little on the warm side when you go outdoors. *Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes*, *We Love Katamari Damacy*, *Makai Kingdom*, *Rainbow Six: Lockdown*, *Nanostray*, *Fahrenheit*, *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe*, *Winning Eleven 9*… the list goes on, but then we wouldn't want to spoil it all for you, would we?

"THE SAME AGAIN, ONLY BETTER – ISN'T THAT WHAT KATAMARI FANS WANT?"



Metal Slug – is it really one of the greatest games ever created? Retro says it just might be…

MORE… RETRO

As always, Retro will offer a teary-eyed look back at the greatness that was old-school gaming. From going behind the scenes of how *Robotron* was made and the true brilliance of *Metal Slug* to an in-depth look at *Alien Breed* and another legendary machine, there's plenty here to get your juices flowing. Just remember to mop them up afterwards, please…

ON SALE 8 SEPT 05

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

WHO'S GOT THE bigger willy? Isn't that a question we've been asking since we learned to speak? Of course it is. Everyone wants the bigger willy. Only now, willies are a thing of the past. Now it's all, "Is that a DS in your pocket? Or are you just pleased to PSP?".

All those who believe they're hardcore game-nuts, standing before the beloved St. Nintendo, run to the left of the room, stylus in hand, scribbling rude effigies into their dual-screen brick. The other side run to the right of the room, those fashion-conscious motor-mouths who just have to have it all. Yours only plays games? Mine makes breakfast!

The great divide. Is it a war of quality or quantity? Is it a war of fashion pride? Or is it simply that age-old schoolyard banter: who has the bigger willy?

But why bicker over the qualities of the two when they're so different? The price, graphics and interfaces of both machines are so remarkably varied that there really is no reason to squabble. One is a machine of innovation and gaming passion at an affordable price, and one of graphical and artistic finesse at a slightly less affordable price. Both have equally outstanding games and both have their flaws. And yet this war will rage on, as it has done from the days of the first home computers. As Ghandi once said though, "What kind of victory is it if someone is left defeated?".
David Douglas

games™: That's the way of the world though – without competition there wouldn't be much of an industry left. Unfortunately, with gamers it does seem to come down to petty squabbling with virtually no basis in fact, but then everyone's got an opinion. Those of us who realise that having every console is the only way to have the best of the gaming world are clearly in the minority… but that's what makes us so darn special.

THE PLAYSTATION3 AND Xbox 360 screenshots look great, but I've got one issue: will 'real gaming' disappear over time? I heard EA thinks that future boxing sims will be "so realistic there will be no need for health bars, as you can see how damaged your opponent is." No health bars? What sorcery is this? Don't get me wrong, better graphics are a good thing, but I started playing games not to be immersed in an 'interactive film' but for pure fun. Games like poor movie spin-offs do nothing to help.

People think wearing VR helmets and being in a cyber world is a great idea, but that isn't what gaming is about. It's about having a controller in your grasp, using pure skill to get past games. These games 'recreating' World War II and Vietnam are all alike. Why can't people get original ideas for once? I just hope gaming companies don't evolve into the 'more realism, less fun' side of thinking.
James Madson

games™: Sadly, we've heard enough people tell us that 'it's all about the graphics' to know that developers are already going down this road. We've got no problem with realistic games, but there has to be a balance; sometimes we just want exaggerated characters, neon lights and plenty of fun. Remember that? Fun? It's what gaming used to be about… but that was a long time ago. Probably when dragons existed.

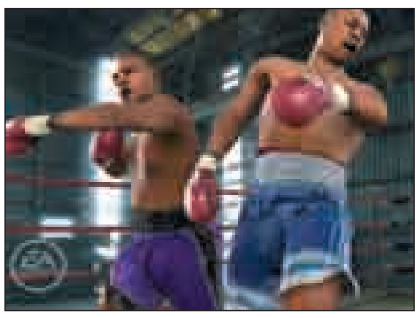
"WHY BICKER OVER THE QUALITIES OF THE DS AND PSP WHEN THEY'RE SO DIFFERENT? THE PRICE, GRAPHICS AND INTERFACES OF BOTH MACHINES ARE **SO REMARKABLY VARIED THAT THERE REALLY IS NO REASON TO SQUABBLE"**



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Realistic damage is all very well, but whether that's a decent substitute for energy bars is something else altogether.



The PSP – revolutionary handheld or jumped-up PS2? The Shape might not have made himself as clear as he thought he did…

THE OVERRIDING THEME of your Letter From America column a couple of months back was the question 'why would anyone want to play on a PSP when they had a home console, wired to a large TV and surround system?' [issue 32].

Well, I'd like to have a go at answering that. Let me start by outlining my lifestyle. I don't have one. Every waking hour is chock full with kids, pets, a partner and work. The PSP has been a revelation. You can switch the thing off, then switch it on two days later and pick up where you left off. No rebooting. No painful load/save routine. It's there, ready to play. Brilliant. Better than that, I don't need to fire up the TV, surround sound system or find a controller. And I can play PSP anywhere: inside, outside, in bed, on a sofa or on the bog. Good though the holy console trinity are, they hardly get a look in these days.

The DS also exemplifies why handheld gaming is persistently popular; it's the next obvious transition after moving from PC gaming to home consoles. I know PC gamers who moved to the Xbox because configuring the PC was such a pain. But I'll be honest, even configuring my non-handheld consoles is a chore – RGB SCART leads, optical leads, the three-way switch box I use so I can flip between GC and PS2, selections of controllers, making sure the correct AV channel is selected on the three bits of kit involved in the video signal chain… It's hell. The back of my TV looks like American McGee's mind and my girlfriend can barely watch BBC3 via the Freeview box, let alone work out how to play the Xbox.

So it's not about that ubiquitous 'train journey' The Shape mentioned (indeed, I feel the looks I normally get when I play PSP on a train are akin to pulling out a black marker and scrawling 'I read animal porn' on my forehead). No, it's about the simplification of gaming to its purest form. And it's a form I can actually enjoy these days, because if I didn't have the PSP and DS I think I'd go mad.
Ben Thomas

games™: While we appreciate your love of handhelds you've missed the point of what our dear old Shape was getting at. It wasn't so much about the difference between consoles and handhelds, but rather than lack of it – specifically, the route that Sony has gone down with the PSP by essentially creating a 'mini PS2'. We can see his point (why would people want to play visually inferior handheld versions of the games they already have at home?) although it may just be his cynical old mind making a mountain out of a molehill.

NOT LONG NOW – 1 October, the pencilled-in release date for *Shadow Of The Colossus*, or *Ico 2* for those poor few not



CONTACT

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Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

☐ why are you guys always so negative about EAs games? do you hate thm?
gTM: Don't be silly – we don't hate EA. We just wish some of its games were a bit better than they actually are.

☐ Your Essentials pages are wrong - loads of decent games are missing. Sort it out!
gTM: 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder', apparently… but who's to say that you're not the one in the wrong and we're right, eh?

☐ Can i have a job pls?
gTM: No, but you can borrow our dictionary. Looks like you might be needing one.

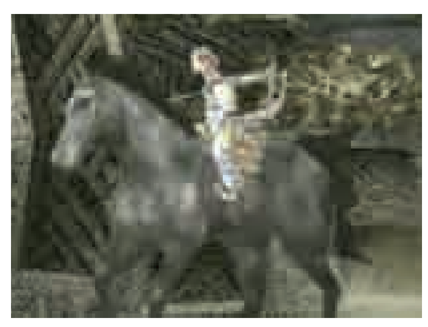
☐ Fair play on Advent Rising! It's so bad - how is getting decent scores elsewhere?
gTM: Who knows? Perhaps everyone else caught a bad case of Likedreadfulgame-itis just before it came out…

☐ curse u for making me play disgaea. i just want 2 play other games but i can't stop!
gTM: Ah, we only write the reviews. The path of your gaming destiny lies within your own hands. Or something.

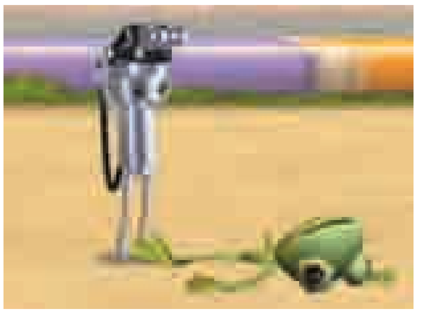
☐ Killer 7 is bloody rubbish, there's no game there at all you sily journalists
gTM: Ahh, constructive criticism – there really is nothing like it. And this is nothing like it.

☐ its a good job your a games magazine and not a film magazine. you think james herbert wrote dune. it was frank herbert. james herbert wrote crappy horror stuf. frank herbert is a GOD.
gTM: Really? Call us agnostics then. No, sorry, our bad. Won't happen again.

☐ Any news of Pro Evo on the PSP? Im dying to be able to play evo every second of the day.
gTM: It's out in September, according to Konami – although we doubt playing it every day would be good for you.



■ **We've been looking forward to *Shadow Of The Colossus* since before it was announced – it just looks so special, we want to cry.**



■ **Anyone suggesting that *Chibi-Robo* isn't a game worth playing for its charm alone needs a good slap across the legs with a hairbrush.**

yet aware. While I know I should be jumping up and down like a slavering prat at the thought of playing this game, I can't help but be concerned. The root of my concern lies in that most horrid of gaming buzzwords: innovation.

You may argue about the definition of the word, but you can't deny that *Ico* was (and still is) a unique experience. There's nothing else like it on the PS2, and for that at least it's an innovative game. For years it has stood as a resilient oak in a sea of cliches. *FIFA 2005*, *Splinter Cell 3*, *Pro Evo 4* – ever since some bright spark realised that sequels sell, gamers everywhere have cried out for something new. Once in a while, their calls are answered, most relevantly in the form of titles such as *Katamari Damacy* and *Ico*. The problem comes when we get our filthy, hypocritical hands on said games and complete them.

Not a week after the release of one of these pillars of innovation, internet forums around the globe are awash with ramshackled petitions for a sequel. Publishers aren't dumb, they listen. *We Love Katamari*. *Shadow Of The Colossus*. *FIFA 2006*. The mighty oak collapses. Why is it a tradition among gamers to cry out for innovation, then when they get their wish, cry out for innovation's sequel?
Liam Barnard

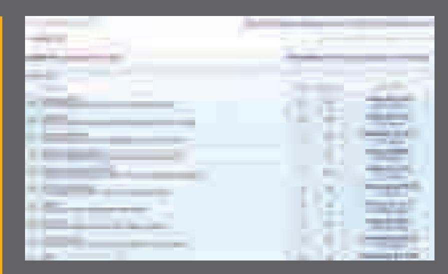
gamesTM: Because we can't get enough of a good thing? Or perhaps because gamers want all their innovating done for them. People moan about a lack of innovation, demanding more of the same when it does finally come along, but you don't see them coming up with new ideas on their own. That's for developers to do, isn't it? Well, no – not really. We should be thankful such people exist to fill our world with light and colour, but we can't rely on them forever; after all, even the brightest sparks die out over time.

☐ **IT'S TOO SOON**, isn't it? I mean, I must buy over 200 games a year. I own all the major consoles. A trip to Game is starting to feel like I'm browsing my own games collection. I even own a Tapwave Zodiac and PS2 fishing rod controller. But even I'm looking at the Xbox 360 with the same wary eye a puppy watches an approaching bumblebee.

December? I've got stacks of unplayed games from the last generation. I've even divided them into piles: ones I want to finish; ones I'd like to finish but know I never will; ones I bought because they had a nice box; ones I can't finish because I've forgotten the plot and the controls… December? I mean, December 2006 I could handle, but December this year? That's terrifying.

Take *Oddworld* on the Xbox, it's graphically superb. It's not far shy of some high-end PC titles and even loads up in milliseconds just to rub it in. I haven't finished enjoying that yet,





FROM THE FORUM

IS GAMING SOMETHING TO BE ASHAMED OF?

and now I've got a whole new series of games to enjoy that are going to be even prettier? It's like sitting in a restaurant where the waiters whip away your food as soon as the fork touches the plate. I'm imploring Microsoft to stop and think. When even hardened technophiles such as myself raise an eyebrow at a release date then perhaps, just perhaps, you've bolted a little too early, Mr Gates.

Of the big three manufacturers Nintendo wins my respect most. Its designers were probably hanging round at a sushi bar, idly deciding how far they could push the *Mario Party* series, when someone rushed in to say the Xbox 360 was about to be released. I'm sure in the ensuing panic when the small black box with glowing Cylon eye and revolutionary controller 'that we can't actually show you' were hastily sketched on a beer mat Nintendo must have been as flabbergasted as I was…

But the irony is that I'll be there, handing over my £360 on launch day and buying shallow, vapid titles with about as much gameplay as *Eternal Ring*. Why? Because I'm stupid. And as my mother's most inspirational piece of advice goes, 'never underestimate just how stupid the general population is'. I'm sure Microsoft will be hoping against hope she's right, or I can't see an Xbox 720 hoving into view in a couple of years' time....

Andrew Stockwell

games™: Perhaps it does seem too soon, but who are we to stop the march of technology? As much as some of us will complain that the current generation still has plenty of life in it, the PlayStation2 has been around for over five years – according to past transitions, it's about time for a change. The fact that Microsoft is taking the first step, though, only proves that it wants to keep up with the Jones and not launch two years late this time. Bill Gates' firm might have a reputation for pushing too hard, but it's doubtful you'll see another change any time soon (we hope).

I KNOW IT'S been happening for years, but I'm still bitter about missing out on certain games that only get released in Japan. I'm not talking about the train sims or the dating games necessarily, but games such as *Katamari Damacy* and *Chibi-Robo*. They're ripe for us open-minded Western gamers, yet we get stiffed in favour of the latest movie licence. I don't want to invalidate my console's warranty just to play something which will cost me a fortune and could possibly not even play due to the language barrier.

Surely now the market's expanding there are audiences for these games. If publishers had been so narrow-minded back in the Eighties we wouldn't have had *Pac-man* or even *Mario*! So, please, to those in charge, let us Westerners get our hands on the best games. It's just not fair!

Oliver Gray

games™: We agree, although you're not looking at the bigger picture – gaming's a business first and foremost (for the people making the game, at least), so the chance of niche Japanese titles getting released in the West is minimal if there's no guarantee of success. That said, smaller publishers – such as GameStreet 505 – are starting to take risks, so the tide may be turning. And, of course, Namco's seen the error of its ways with *Katamari Damacy*. Hurrah.

"I'M IMPLORING MICROSOFT TO STOP AND THINK. WHEN EVEN HARDENED TECHNOPHILES LIKE MYSELF RAISE AN EYEBROW AT A RELEASE DATE THEN **PERHAPS, JUST PERHAPS, YOU'VE BOLTED A LITTLE TOO SOON, MR GATES"**

Folkestonia
A friend recently said, "You know, I find it really strange you like playing games. I thought you were cooler than that." My coolness aside, is a fascination with videogames something to be ashamed of? I've never been worried what people may think of my hobby but are any of you bothered by the negative stereotypes?

darthjim
Gaming has always been seen as the preserve of children and 'geeks'. I doubt this perception will change any time soon, at least until developers start creating truly 'mature' content – not just gratuitous violence/swearing/sex to appeal to 15-year-old boys. Personally, I'm too long in the tooth now to give a monkey's what anyone thinks of anything I do.

Hong Kong Phooey
It doesn't really bother me what people think of me still playing games. My manager thought it very strange when I asked for time off on the Xbox and GameCube launches. Until that moment she didn't know I was a gamer and laughed at me when I asked for the time off.

beemoh
I've managed to surround myself with other gamers, so it's not been an issue – people who believe the negative sterotypes find I've little in common with them and move on. The only real problem is when the stereotype filters up to the mainstream media, like when the *Daily Mail* chooses whatever SICK FILTH it wants to BAN this week. And worse, you get misguided attempts at positive media like *Gamezville*, which only serve to perpetuate the stereotype.

Vocoderfreak
I must admit that I often keep my gaming quiet. I wonder if it's age-related. I'm 33 and people of a similar age express stronger reservations than those that I meet who are younger.

Delboy
I'd rather spend two hours with a game than two hours reading *Heat* magazine and discussing celebrities' latest doings, but in some quarters THAT is considered 'normal'. Still, we'll always have far better hand/eye co-ordination than them.

The Former Peoples Champion
A colleague told me that I should stop playing games and watching movies and 'let my hair down, have some fun' and 'stop being unsociable'. She also questioned how I could justify spending £30-40 a pop on games. The same person came into work today with a roaring hangover, had been puking all night because she drank too much, and managed to blow over £100 on a night out.